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Author
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YahaKo

A WILD
Last BOSS
APPEARED!

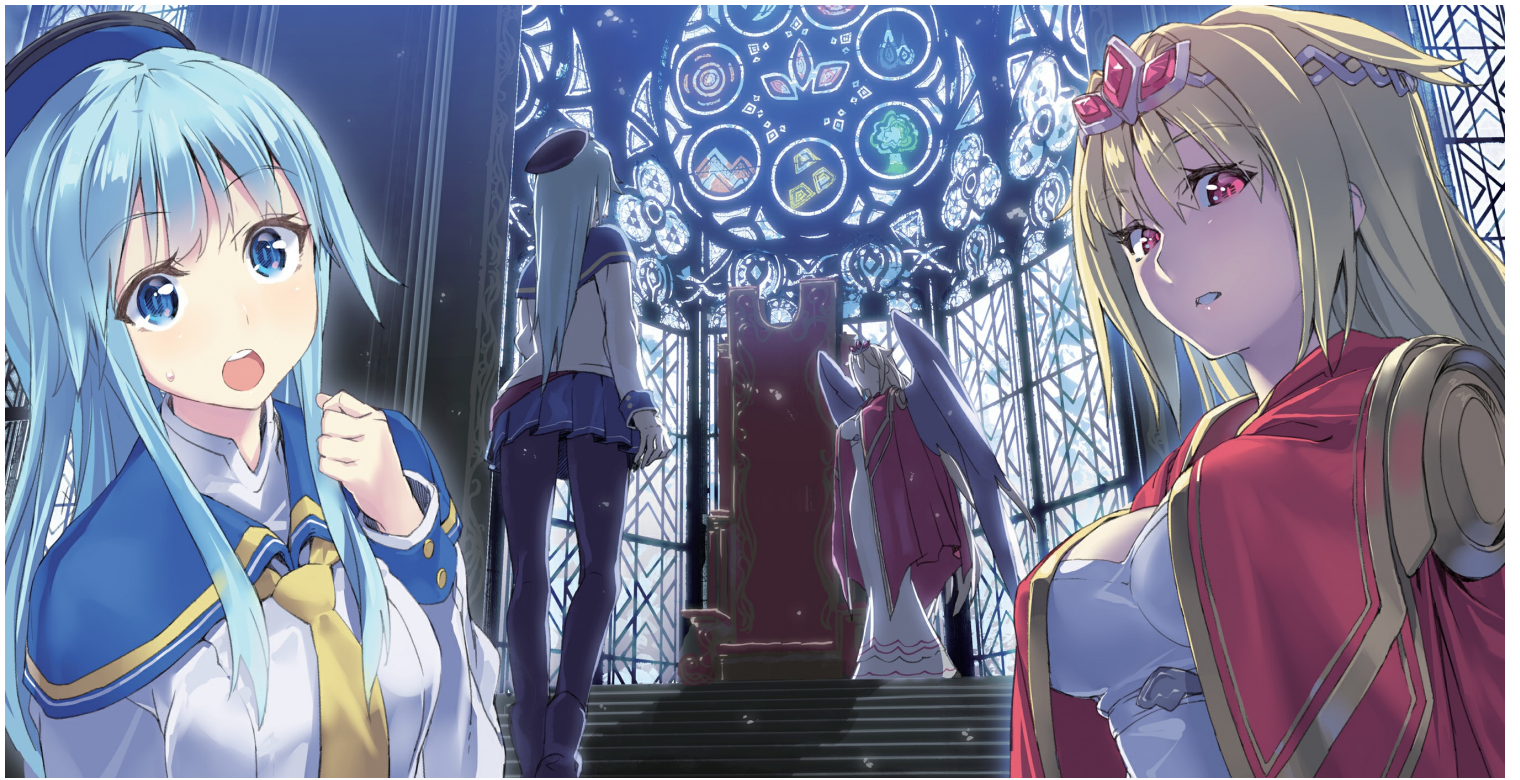
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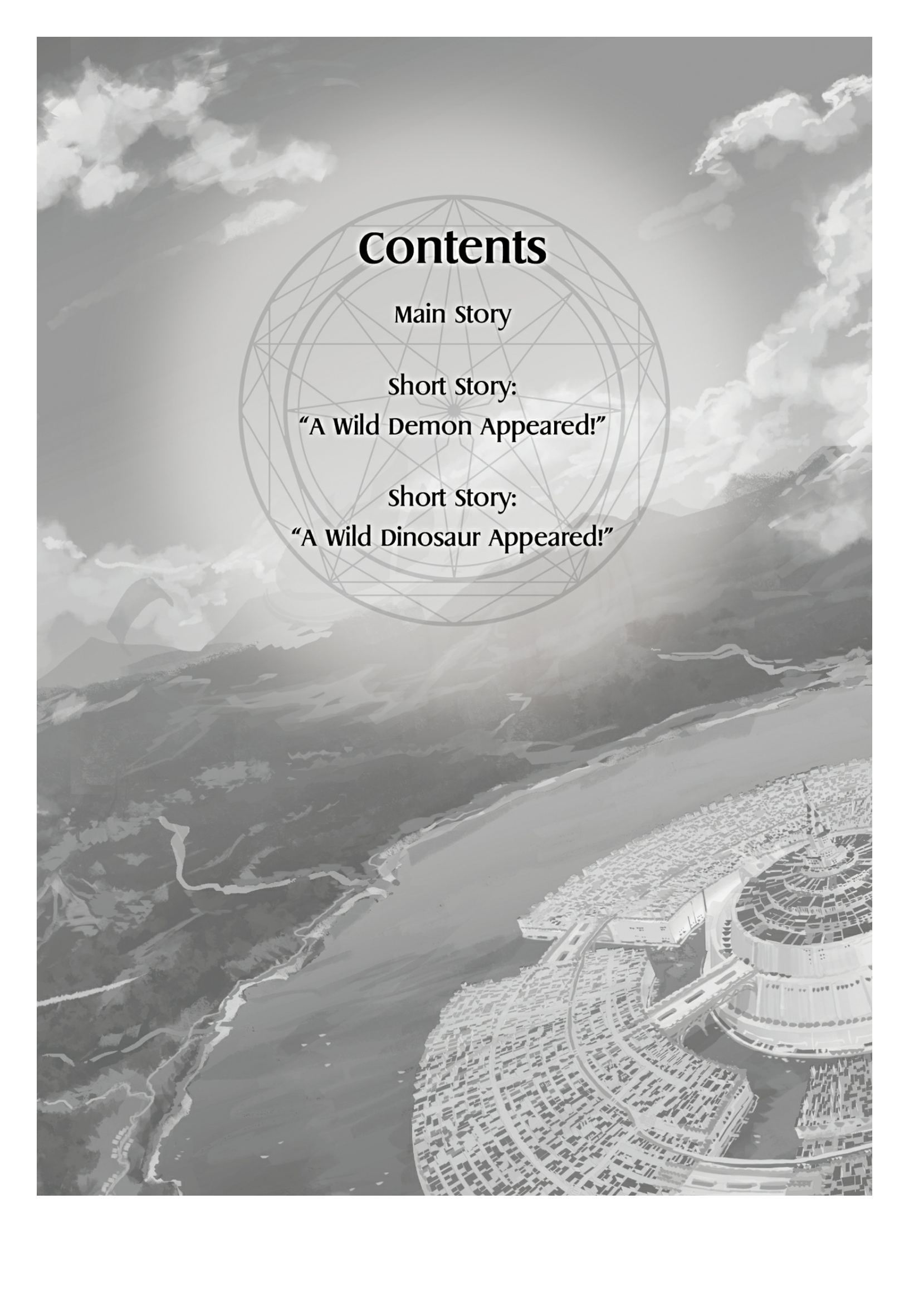
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Nobody could move.

Neither the king on his throne, his soldiers, nor even the court mages.

Not even the king's advisor, who'd lived for over two hundred years.

Everyone saw that figure and was drawn in, absorbed in its presence and yet drowned in utter fear.

Her fluttering hair was a golden hue that turned into a shade of scarlet, as if someone had put a gradation effect over it. Her eyes, which seemed to see through everything, were a fire-like scarlet. Covering her unblemished white skin was a pure-white dress and a cloak of crimson.

Her appearance was so beautiful, symmetrical, and flawless it made one realize the difference between them and perfection, going as far as to result in feelings of misery.

—And peeking out of her cloak was proof of being one of the heaven-winged while at the same time being the taboo of the same race: large, pitch-black wings.

As if a true king had just returned, people bowed their heads in fear.

They could not raise their heads. They could not face forward. Knees shaking, they assumed the position of a retainer welcoming their master home, heads stuck to the ground.

She was the perfect example of a king whose presence commanded the space around them, prompting people to prostrate themselves just by standing there.

She had the presence and dignity of a supreme ruler, one that would brook no argument, as well as the dress of a leader.

And in the center of that whirlpool...

The girl who forced all the people in the castle to prostrate themselves, who gained total control of the place without lifting a finger, smiled silently and thought:

This is bad, some people I don't know are bowing to me. What is this? A prank? What do I do? Just how did all this happen? Someone, please help me! —

It wasn't anyone else, but her, who was most confused in that situation.

* * *

Why is this happening to me?

That's probably first in the order of things I should explain.

But, there's something I should say before that.

I am male.

A perfectly healthy, normal, everyday boy. With that as a premise, I'd like you to listen.

First.....let's see.

I was playing a game, just like usual.

That game being *Exgate Online*.

Exgate Online was an online game that got released in 2027, and this year was their 6th anniversary.

Apparently, it was based off of a family-friendly, orthodox RPG set in Mizgarz, a fantasy world of swords and magic, which got turned into a tabletop RPG before having that turned into the online game we have now. Unfortunately, I never had the original console, so I never played the original game.

.....No, well, I had considered buying it. The console was called "Dreamstation," or "Dreast" for short.

But the Dreast was a console from twenty years ago; it was really hard to find. There weren't any antique game shops anywhere near me, either.

Anyway, it was like *that*. Since the setting of *Exgate Online* was so straightforward and orthodox, it was really easy for beginners to get into. People fought using mainly swords and magic, and there were monsters and elves and fairies. Basically, there were a lot of races mixed in among each other.

You know? You hear that shit so often, right? That's exactly what orthodox is; it's still familiar somehow, even after all these years.

I was a high school student back when I first started this game, and I just started because I kind of felt like it.

There wasn't any real reason for it, and it wasn't like I was invited by a friend, either. It was just a whim.....I noticed it by coincidence, and it was free-to-play so I decided to try. That's all my motivation was. It was simple.

In the end, I got super into it. All my passion was poured into it.

At any rate, I went as far as I could to buy time to play, and any time I was free, I was playing.

By the time I realized, I'd already started buying items with real money, and I ended up getting a part-time job putting stickers on merchandise to make money to spend on the game.

Why a job that I could do at home? Because if I went out, I wouldn't be able to play my game.

I barely even wanted to go to school. And of course, I wasn't involved in any school clubs—the go-home club, if you will.

What was lucky for me, and unlucky for the largest portion of players, was that there was a limit to how long you could play each day. It was probably to try to control the growing number of online game addicts, so for now, let's make that the reason why about ten years ago, they passed a law restricting online play.

So, of course *Exgate Online* couldn't ignore the law and made it so that nobody could play for more than ten hours a day.

Thanks to that, I was able to log basically the same playtime as other addicts even while going to school and maintained my status as one of the top players.

At any rate, I put my all into raising my character.

I leveled up a bunch of jobs to their limit and even tried changing them around.

The selling point of this game was the extremely extensive character creation. If I remember right, there were over 10,000 “parts” to create from. I don't actually know them all.

The fact that you could combine those parts freely to create an essentially infinite amount of avatars led me to like my own character even more, drawing

me in further.

The character I created with that system was “Lufas Maphaahl,” a heaven-winged girl.

The heaven-winged were one of the playable races in this game, and their characteristics were that they could fly, and, in exchange for high basic stats, they couldn’t learn attack magic at all. They were called “the race of kings” and had an inborn charisma that could force others to follow them.

That was reflected in-game, too, in the form of a racial skill that immobilized others if the level gap was too high.

Well, it was completely useless for things like boss fights, though.

I trained and trained Lufas.

No matter how much I paid for the item, I didn’t hesitate to equip the best stuff, and I took part in every event that gave good loot.

Eventually, I started a country—I gathered other players who wanted to join into a combined force, and although at first we were small, we grew and grew.

One of the selling points of the game was a system called “War.”

Two factions would bet everything and fight, and the losing country would be absorbed into the winning country. Lufas used this system to its fullest and conquered many different countries.

Of course, although it’s referred to as conquering, all the wars were started with both parties’ consent.

Doing so without consent was just thievery. Something like that would just get you exposed immediately and ostracized and hated just as fast.

There was also one more selling point to this game.

The “Novel System.”

It was a system that partnered with the internet’s largest novel-submission site, where the things that players did in-game got turned into official canon in the form of a novel.

“I started a war for this reason.”

“We went through this much trouble to finish a quest.”

Send those things in to the official site, and anything they accepted would get displayed on the official homepage.

If you paid money, you could get even small events made into a story, so everywhere in *Exgate Online* was a story, and the players were all the main characters.

And large, critical events were turned into stories free of charge.

My character, Lufas, became a semi-official character that all the players knew. She'd destroyed and taken over many enemy states and was the first character since the game started to combine the entire world into a single country and reign over it as the Great Conqueror.

Lufas Maphaahl, the Black Wings of Terror.

That's right, once I managed to take over the world and create an empire.

As one would expect, I couldn't take over the official last boss's, the devil king's, minions, but everyone other than the free players became citizens under Lufas.

The above event was treated grandly by the above Novel System, and people started saying a lot of different things about Lufas. If I remember right, they were things like, “You're a wild last boss,” or “Geez, why don't you just become the last boss?”

But then, a problem happened.

A unified world was, honestly, not fun game-wise.

It was a waste of a fun mechanic in the War System, and made it harder for new players to make their own new countries.

So, I consulted with other high-level players, and we agreed on holding a player-created event.

We contacted a famous novelist on the site and had him create a new “crux of history.”

The story went like this:

The world was invaded by the Great Conqueror Lufas and unified through force.

However, heroes rose up.

Even while being ruled, they waited for a chance, and along with others who agreed, they stood against the root of evil, Lufas, in rebellion! Oh, great heroes. Such bravery is true nobility!

Now, drag the Great Conqueror who exploits tyranny to no end down from her throne! —Yeah, I'm straight-up the bad guy.

Essentially, we split the world into two forces: the Conqueror's Army led by Lufas, and the Army of Light led by the heroes. Then, we proceeded to leave the official last boss in the dust as we held the biggest battle in the history of the game by ourselves.

So to spoil the conclusion for you, I lost.

I mean, basically all the most powerful players were on the other side! As if I could win.

But I still tried my best.

By the time I noticed, I was already alone, but I still rampaged as hard as I could.

I used my racial skill to neutralize all the weak players—around 80% of them—and did my absolute best and managed to take it to a one-on-one fight with their leader.

.....Well, at that point my HP was already dipping past the 20% line, though.

Yeah, it was over in one hit.

I made the first move and managed to bring my opponent's HP down to 0 once, but he used the skill "Huge Comeback," something totally for main characters, to revive himself and win a miraculous come-from-behind victory. At least, that's how he played it.

I mean, he definitely took that last attack on purpose.

After getting hit by the leader's—and all the other high-level players'—

ultimate moves in a show of complete overkill, I was subjected to a subspace seal (*a magic spell that exiles someone or something into subspace*, or so the flavor text goes). It even came with the description: *Finishing an enemy with this will extend the time it takes for them to revive.*

Please stop! I'm already out of HP! Well, I didn't like the idea of getting wrecked without even saying anything, so before I was completely gone I even tried to roleplay, saying, "Well done, heroes! You have done a wonderful job surpassing us! If it's with all of you, you might be able to win, even against that detestable devil king!"Yeah, uhhh... I was young.

Just like that, Lufas lost, and the world was freed from her grasp. —That was how the end of the story went.

The reactions to it were really good. Enough that people said things like, "Like, this can just be the real ending," "That was a good last episode," "Hey, don't forget about the devil king (lol)!," "Devil king? Oh yeah, the one that hid until Lufas was dead. Uhhh, what was his name again?," and "Lol, that's way too cruel." It was big enough that it basically sparked an internet party.

Even though I lost, I still managed to complete a huge event and was satisfied with that. I was even grinning from ear to ear as I looked at the message boards.

So, when I tried to log in the next day, an unfamiliar character popped up on the screen.

Her name was the God of All Creation, Alovenus. In the story, she was the one who created the world of Exgate, and to put it bluntly, she was basically the avatar of the devs.

She was a cheat character that popped up during times like when a player logs in for the first time or during official events, and although she does have her stats set, they're so ridiculously high no one would ever be able to even think of beating her.

Like, what the hell? 999,900,000,000 health? You screwing with me? Even bosses don't go past a million in this game, you know?

So, the official cheater Alovenus appeared and said this to me:

“I shall bestow upon you a new role.”

I took this as some sort of message from the devs.

Right now, Lufas was treated as a big boss character on the level of the devil king in *Exgate Online*. Of course, the game company wouldn't be able to ignore her, especially if the next day I tried to log in again after such a huge event like nothing had happened.Yeah, I get it. Even I think it's kinda uncool.

I was thinking, like: *If I just log in like this, what'll happen to the story if I just revive like nothing happened?* So honestly, this was a godsend.

That's why I clicked the “Yes” option in response to the message.

I had no idea what kind of event it was, but I'd been getting through official events just fine up until now.

So whatever plan they have for me, bring it on, I say!

With that thought in mind—.

Then, my vision whited out.

* * *

And now, we're back to the beginning.

With all these people prostrating themselves around me.

My chest was feeling especially heavy, and I had a feeling of loss along with a lighter feeling around my crotch.

I noticed the dress and cloak I was wearing, as well as my long hair on the edge of my sight along with black wings growing out of my back.

Looking with my vision, which had gotten strangely good, and using a window that was a distance away, I saw an unbelievably beautiful girl reflected back at me. It was like a joke.

I.....became Lufas? Nonono. No way.

I'm a guy, right? Lufas is a girl, right? She was a beautiful girl character that I made after several hours of scratching my head over her, and for a stupid reason, too, you know? I just thought I'd be more into it looking at a cute girl the entire time rather than at a guy. Like, what's even the point of becoming

her? Now I can't see her at all!

".....Hm. Now, We're quite unable to grasp the entire picture..... Will someone explain this to us?"Heyyy!

I knew that my voice would be different. I was prepared for it.

But what was up with my speech?

I tried to say 'Sorry, I'm not really sure what's going on, so can someone explain this to me please?' But instead, something needlessly pompous spilled out of my mouth.

Isn't this exactly how I used to RP Lufas when I was playing?

"What is wrong, children of man? Raise your heads. How long are you planning to lay there? Or is this the natural posture for your people? If that is so, We apologize for our ignorance." No, that's not what I meant! This is just roundabout sarcasm!

This isn't what I want to say.

'What's wrong? Please get up. If you keep staying like that we'll get nowhere. Also, this might be rude, but is this just how you all are normally? If that's the case, I'm sorry, I didn't know!' —That was what I was really trying to say.

But like that it was just really oppressive.

Oh no, with this habit everything I say gets blown out of proportion. What should I do?

.....Ah, right! That's what it is, my racial skill, "Pressure!" I probably have it turned on.

Uhhh, I should be able to turn it on and off..... Turn off, turn off! Come on, my Pressure!

Ghhh! My Pressure tingles.....! ".....Ah, is that it? Excuse us, what a thoughtless thing We have done. Of course it would be difficult to talk like this." Pressure, OFF! I tried to will it off, but unlike in the game, no convenient window popped up, and all these strange old guys stayed with their heads down and wouldn't move.

.....Hey, I said OFF! You get it right? I want to stop my skill.

Please, just take a rest, Pressure.

Ah, no, please turn off, I'm begging you.

My desperate pleas must have worked, as all the people that had stayed prostrated up until now raised their heads, and started sending terrified looks my way.

"Oh, ohhh..... Th-this figure is..... No way..... Sh-she was alive....." Some stick of a man with long ears dressed like a priest said while shaking like a leaf.

How rude. I don't remember ever dying.

Ah, but didn't Lufas just die yesterday?

"O-Ohhh..... What a mistake we've committed..... Something that will never be forgiven.....never..... Just why did the ritual for the descent of the hero..... Instead of a hero, we have released the Great Conqueror....."

"—Hm, We understand now. It seems you all know of us. Then this situation, We shall have you explain it." It seems like that stick knows me.

Then things should go a little better if I get him to explain.

In order to calm him down I put on a smile, and tried to place my words as nicely as possible to convince him I was harmless.

"Do not be so afraid, child of man. We shall do nothing to you..... Do not worry, and tell us everything." —But still, can't I do anything about the way I speak?



* *

The Black-Winged Conqueror, Lufas Maphaahl.

It happened two hundred years ago. The distinguished girl turned out, in the year 2800 of the Mizgarz calendar, to be hiding her true nature as an absolute ruler.

Her power would behead dragons bigger than mountains with a single swing of her arm, and her legs could carry her leagues in an instant. She was arrogant, and no one was more ruthless. Anybody that tried to stand against her would be beaten to the ground. Weaklings would not even be allowed to stand before her, and even the strong were torn to pieces like scraps of paper.

It was even said that she was the only opponent the devil king ever avoided. —There is no shortage of historians who insist that if she had been allowed to remain in power, we might be living in a world without a devil king at all right now.

She was strong, relentlessly so. She used that strength to unite the world into one country and ruled over all races, with the exception of devilfolk.

However, being too strong incurs fear.

Back then, people were not nearly as weak as they are now. There were heroes that could oppose Lufas who gathered their courage and stood up to her.

The people came together, and with the objective of casting her down, they rose up against her.

That was probably the time people were most united in recorded history. Whether as a ruler or an enemy, for better or worse, no one united people like Lufas had.

The heroes, who came together with bonds like steel, splendidly brought down her stronghold. They defeated her loyal subjects, the Twelve Heavenly Stars, and finally managed to drag Lufas herself to the battlefield.

The battle lasted the entire night.

The sheer aura of willpower that Lufas emitted would not even permit weaker

opponents to stand, and out of eight million brave warriors, seven million of them had their wills crushed.

While carving through, piercing, or crushing countless warriors, Lufas ran the line between life and death. Even while being cut by swords, pierced by spears, and burned by countless magics, she finally managed to land a fatal blow on The Chosen, the symbol of everyone's hope.

But The Chosen stood up once more. Using hope as his power, even after losing his life, he thrust his sword in order to destroy evil.

Then, the heroes all attacked at once.

Not even Lufas Mapphaahl could escape unscathed.

However, even so, she laughed.

With a pleasant smile, she shouted as if she would stand up once again:

“Well done! Well done, heroes, you surpassed us splendidly! We have nothing but heartfelt admiration for your bravery and strength! But do not forget, the darkness has not left. With your union, you may yet defeat even the devil king—but should you lose, the world will be plunged into even greater darkness. Whether your path is one of light or darkness, We will be watching from the depths of hell! Khahahahaha..... HAAAHHHHAHAHAHAHAHA!!”

Just like that, the story of Lufas Mapphaahl ended. Having already been defeated, she was further sealed into subspace, and it should have been impossible for her to ever return to this world.

Should have been.

Ahh, but then how should I explain this situation? How should I explain this black-winged girl, giving off an aura of absolute presence? “So, how long are you planning to stay silent? You, were you not going to explain to us this present situation?” He, pitifully, was sitting across from Lufas in one of the castle's meeting rooms. —The young elf, who two hundred years ago succumbed to her Pressure without even being able to fight, thought:

Is this punishment from heaven for trying to summon a hero? The object of the ritual was to draw in an uninvolved bystander from another world, and

make them fight. Yes, it was a sinful thing to do. He knew that.

That's why he was sure he would receive divine punishment, and was convinced that he would be cast down into the depths of hell.

Ahh, but Great Creator Alovenus, this is too cruel!

It's too much to revive the great conqueror when we were trying to summon a hero!

In response to his confusion, Lufas crossed her arms and thought:

My wings are in the way; it's hard to sit. The situation wasn't as serious as the young elf was thinking.

* *

It took several minutes of waiting for the silent, long-eared hottie to start talking. He threw glances at me every now and again, before immediately getting scared and hiding his face.

Even so, he started to slowly, word by word, start talking, while still being extremely jumpy and sensitive to whether I was getting angry at every little thing. His story could be summed up into three points:

1. Even after two hundred years, the devil king is so scary it ain't funny.
2. Oh yes! Let's use an Exgate spell to summon a hero!
3. But somehow, it wasn't a hero, but a last boss that appeared..... ← We are here.

.....So short! And it took him several tens of minutes to say that? Just how scared of me is he?

But more importantly, this place really was inside the game. I was already getting there myself, though. Not only that, it was two hundred years after the Mizgarz I knew. What kind of unknown world was I even called to?

No, but well, to tell the truth, I was a little excited at the situation.

I've always been optimistic, and I still feel like, as long as I'm having fun, I don't need to sweat the small stuff.

Now I could walk the world of *Exgate Online*, which I love, as Lufas, whom I

poured all my heart into making. As an online game addict, this was basically a reward.

Oh, right, the Exgate spell is derived from the name of the game, *Exgate Online*, and it was basically the blood and guts of this world.

The origins went back to when it was still a console game apparently, but it seemed that the protagonist of the original game was an average Japanese student. Said protagonist was summoned to another world via an Exgate, and over the course of the game's story basically was led to beating the devil king.

Anyway, for the online game it basically was there in name only..... To think that bit of fluff survived. I actually felt a little moved.

Oh, wait, wasn't the hero supposed to appear in the year 3000 of the Mizgarz calendar?

Oh man, then isn't this timing perfect?

I dunno if an otherworld hero will actually appear here, in the online game world, but if he does I should totally get his autograph.

Still, I needed to figure out what to do now, first.

The elf bro and king over there have been looking so nervous for a while now and it's making me feel sorry for them. For now, it looks like I'm only going to be scaring them constantly by being here, so let's just show them I'm harmless and leave.

".....We see, We understand now. So the devil king is still alive and healthy..... That one is also quite stubborn." The devil king got appended with a (lol) thanks to me, so hearing he was fine was a relief.

So, apparently, they tried to call a hero in order to counter him.

Hmm..... Yeah, sorry. I ruined your long-awaited coming of the hero scene.

"Ahh, do not worry. We do not feel like doing anything to this world now. We have already been defeated, our dreams shattered.....there is nothing We want to do now."

"A-are you telling...the truth?"

“Indeed. Although We lost, We were still satisfied with the ending of that fight. It’s unfortunate that the ones who defeated us could not win against the devil king but.....well, that is fine. More importantly, right now We just want to see this world and admire it.” For now, I decided to throw all responsibility for the devil king to the hero that may or may not appear.

I’d rather go sightseeing around Mizgarz than do that. I wanted to walk with my own feet, and see with my own eyes.

Honestly, I almost wanted to leave right now.

“A king with no followers and an empty throne. It would be laughable to continue to sing of our supremacy like this, no? Right now, We are not the great conqueror Lufas, but simply a girl who has had her dreams broken.” I have no intention of being the great conqueror in this world.

Actually, if I did that I’d totally head straight for the most-wanted list. So I won’t stand out, and instead have my fill of this world at my leisure.

As for how to get back to my world, well, I’ll think of that later.

“So there is no need for your concern. Just forget about us, and do what you like, even try to summon another hero.” I can’t stand to sit here any longer.

I got up off my chair and opened a nearby window.

It was a strange thing, but I knew how to move my wings, something I’d never had up until now, like I’d always had them.

I even knew how to fly.

I was thinking that there was no way to physically fly with a person’s body and these wings, but my instincts told me I could and gave me the GO sign.

“Well then, We will be leaving now. Let us meet again should the fates will it.”

“W-Wai—!” I ignored the voice trying to stop me and spread my wings.

I jumped, and my body flew through the air splendidly.

I put distance between me and the ground in an instant, and in the blink of an eye the castle was already the size of a grain.

Ohh.....

I'm flying..... I'm really flying! I'm, like, swimming freely through the air! How should I express this feeling...

Freedom. Yeah, it's freedom.

The joy of being free from the bonds of gravity.

My feet weren't on the ground; I was completely free and insecure, making my way through 3D space. I can go in circles, I can go up and down, I can fly as free as I like! "Heh, heheh.....Ahahahahaha!" I flew above the clouds, before descending rapidly, before stopping right above the ground, like bungee jumping without the cord. I started flying up right after almost hitting the ground, and returned to the sky, where I could see the whole world stretching before me.

Right now, the vast sky was my dominion.

There were no annoying crowds or traffic.

I could fly as much as I liked; I could go anywhere!



“Haha..... Flying through the sky like this feels nice. Now then, where should we go first?” It was actually more troubling to decide where to go if one could go anywhere.

For now, this country was out. That elf bro might have put out an order to everyone to arrest me, and if that was the case it'd be annoying to deal with.

I just want to have a leisurely trip around the world.

“.....Hm? Ohh, that's..... We see, so it still stands.” While I was wondering what to do, something appeared on the edge of my vision. That something was a black tower, climbing high into the heavens.

I knew that building that was like the picture of a rude gesture challenging the heavens. I could never forget it. After all, that was the building I built with my friends, a symbol of our power.

The sky tower “Maphaahl.”

It was my base, made by me.....no, by all of us.

“It seems our first destination is decided.” I changed directions and flapped my wings.

The distance to the tower I could see in the distance was unclear. Most likely, it was pretty far away, but that was no problem for me as I was now.

After all, I have these wings to fly with.

“Hah!” I flew as hard as I could towards the tower.

It was a perfect chance to test just how far this body would go, and, most importantly, I wanted to try flying for real.

The scenery blew past me at a tremendous rate, and the wind caressed my cheeks. This was just my feeling, and I wasn't sure if I was right, but it felt like the scenery was passing me by faster than if I was riding a bullet train. And on top of that, I could pick out little details in the distance with my sight.

I could easily dodge any birds in my way, and it was easy to change directions while keeping my speed.

Ahh, it feels so nice.

It's uplifting my heart.

Flying was such a simple thing. I never expected it would make me feel this free and be this wonderful! However, all good things must come to an end.

After only a couple minutes of flying, I reached the tower and had to suddenly put on the brakes. The wind blew violently, and the atmosphere shook. It was only logical that a corresponding amount of wind would follow if something slightly larger than a human were to fly at that speed before suddenly putting on the brakes.

A weak opponent might be blown away with just the force of that wind.

Next, I climbed.

Past the clouds and yet still higher, I aimed for the top of the tower, made so that only a fraction of the most powerful heaven-winged would be able to reach it with their flight.

According to a fairy tale, Icarus, who flew too close to heaven with his wax wings, had them melted and fell to the earth. However, my wings were not wax. Something like the light of the sun would never melt them.

I didn't know how many thousands of meters above the ground the top of the tower was, but after reaching it, I looked for the sole entrance built there.

There were only two ways to enter the top floor: to come in from the sky, or climb up from the inside.

It was a troublesome little tower, if I did say so myself.

While reminiscing in my mind, I entered the tower and entered the area where only the leader was allowed.

In *Exgate Online*, players who created countries, or in other words armies, were allowed their own base. Most bases were castles, but there was no real need for them to be castles. They weren't popular, but temples or shrines or, in extreme cases, cafes for some reason could become bases.

It made me think: *I'm not sure how I feel about the center of a country being a cafe*, but since it was allowed within the system there was no complaining about it.

Out of all those multitudes of options, I chose the tower.

Players were free to design their bases how they wished, so I got really into it. I customized the tower even more every time our forces grew bigger, and I even incorporated the ideas of players with better aesthetic sense than me, so I managed to make this “Maphaahl Tower” the single best piece of architecture in all of Mizgarz.

“.....It’s grown old and worn. But We still see the resemblance.” Two hundred years had passed since this tower was in use, so it was quite worn and dirty. Even so, I could still see the shadows and traces of what the tower used to be.

The first thing I did was introduce my butt to the deep crimson throne, which, even after being broken, still looked imposing in the room.

The broken window was once occupied with stained glass.

Red, blue, green, gold, brown, orange, and silver. It represented the circle of seven elements that existed in this world: Fire, Water, Wood, Metal, Earth, Sun, and Moon. The glass, which even had the colors labeled, was now broken, however, with only traces of it remaining.

Elements in games were usually represented by the usual four: Fire, Water, Wind, and Earth, but *Exgate Online*’s elements were made with the seven days of the week as reference. In order of weakness to each other, it went: Water > Fire > Metal > Wood > Earth > Water, and the player was able to choose their character’s element in the character creator.

Of course, this affected the character’s magical abilities, so it was important for people planning to play magic users.

As for healing magic.....in this world it was called “heavenarts,” and was treated as completely different from magic so even the heaven-winged race could use it, but the character’s element also played a big part in it. Messing up and making a fire-aligned acolyte, when fire basically didn’t have any heavenarts in it at all, would make for a sad character.

However, failing like that was also one of the fun parts of this game.

Running my fingers along the cracked walls, I reminisced on fun times.

Everyone was there back then. Everyone who followed me talked about just how huge they would make our army, and we had fun with other conversations about pointless things or made promises to hunt together. We partied together like idiots way into the night, and drank like we were bathing in alcohol.....

—.....No, wait a second. Why am I remembering it like I was there?

Thinking carefully, the Lufas in the game was the one drinking booze. It wasn't me. I was sitting in front of my computer.

In the first place, I was thinking of it like it happened a long time ago. But it was only a few days ago that my army split in two. It was way too early to think of it like a nostalgic memory.

This won't do; could it be my memories are mingling in with Lufas'?

This was a mixing between games and reality.

Well, given how things are going that's exactly how it was, though.

Also—.

"How strange. This should be our first time seeing this, but We feel it to be nostalgic. We feel relaxed in this place." There was a sense of nostalgia welling up in my chest. It was strange, like I'd come back home after being gone for a long time.

Is something wrong with me? Or am I really starting to merge with Lufas herself? At the moment, I couldn't tell.

".....Hm?" Suddenly, I heard a sound.

In this place, where I should've been alone, someone other than me made a sound.

Without turning my head, I looked towards where the sound originated from, and saw an unknown girl.

Her pale blue hair like the sea seemed unreal in its color, and her eyes were also a marine blue. She was wearing simple, white clothes, and her skin was fine and white like fresh snow. Her face was amazingly well formed.

.....I don't know this face.

At the very least, she wasn't a member of my army, whom I allowed up here on the highest floor.

Who is she? Why is she here? "—Mistress Lufas! You're Mistress Lufas Maphaahl, aren't you?!" The unknown girl shouted and ran over to me, before gripping my hand.

She looked truly happy from her face to her smile, and I got that she was celebrating my return.

But sadly, I didn't know her.

"You..... Who are you?"

"S-So mean! Did you forget me?! I'm your loyal advisor, Dina! For these two hundred long years, I've always, always been waiting for your return here, you know?!"

Dina? Advisor? What is this girl talking about? I had members of my army who acted as advisors, but none of them went by the name Dina, and I didn't have an actual advisor. Least of all a girl named Dina.....

—.....

—No, there was.

Right, I remember now.

Back when I first made our base, I placed a lot of objects around to decorate the place, and I think one of those was a girl NPC.

That's right, characters were included in the objects you could place around your base. They just walked around randomly and had no meaning and were complete background characters, but I definitely placed one here.

I did it for a pretty meaningless reason, that being that it felt kind of lonely being in a base without any mob characters, so I ended up forgetting about her. I think I remembered getting high on myself back in the beginning and gave her a weird background like "Lufas' Advisor."

But she wasn't capable of combat, and to be honest she was basically a decoration that happened to move around and was shaped like a person, so I didn't bother to remember her. So at some point, she really did start to become

part of the background.

So, that girl who I completely forgot gained a will and has been waiting this entire time? Even if I didn't remember, she did? So she'd been loyally waiting here the entire time, fulfilling her role of advisor? "Ahh, yes.....We remember now. Forgive us, Dina. Something was wrong with us, to forget one such as you." This wasn't a game.

I felt like the truth, which I'd been taking for granted all this time, was suddenly thrust in front of me.

Even if I didn't care or forgot, this world had other lives that would be affected by it.

In the game, forgetting something slight like a decoration would pass with just a, "Oh I forgot about it. Oh well." But that won't fly now that they're alive, with their own thoughts and sense of self.

"Good work. Well done protecting this place while We were away, Dina."

"Y-your praise is too much!"

I must never think of her as a 'human-shaped decoration' ever again. I must always see her as an individual, a person.

"Excuse me, Mistress Lufas. Just how did you manage to revive yourself?"

"Ahh, that? They tried to summon a hero.....Excuse us, We don't know the name of the country. For now, the king of a country to the west made an error and returned us from subspace. Thanks to that, as you can see, We are free to move as We wish."

"West.....that means the country of Laevateinn. Their movements have been hinting at a hero summoning for a while now, so that's what it was....." According to Dina, that country's been trying their best to summon a hero for a while now.

Thanks for the hard work.

And, well, sorry. That I was the one to come out.

"Indeed, and so We are currently dull to the ways of this age. I have heard that that devil king is still alive and well, though."

“That’s right! Those heroes that defeated you, Lufas, those fools ended up splitting apart with their own countries before getting beaten to pieces by the devil king! They’re so useless!”

Ahh, yeah. Sorry, Dina. Splitting up the army was established beforehand. Actually, that entire event was made for our army to split up.....

Well, as expected, the monolith that was Lufas’ army crumbled, and after that many different players formed their own forces as they liked, aiming to be my successor. So that was how the world split apart, huh?

After all, fighting with the devil king was fighting with the official last boss.

Unlike me, where there was no prize even for beating me, beating the devil king had a clear prize to it. That was, rare items and drops. Of course, it’d be hard to get people to unite for that. In fact, there’d probably been vicious people getting in the way of others so they could get to the prize first.

But that’s really just in terms of the game.

In this world, where the game was real, they split apart for some unknown reason, and no one knew why they lost.

No, in the first place, just how much of the game’s settings were applied here? Was stuff that got cemented into the history of the game, like fighting the devil king, reflected here? Or did this place have its own history?The more I thought about it, the less I figured I knew. In the first place, it was weird that game settings even applied.

Just what kind of relationship do this world and the game *Exgate Online* have? They definitely aren’t just different worlds that happen to be similar.

“.....Mistress Lufas?”

“Ahh, sorry. We were just thinking. Dina, if possible, could you tell us about what has happened since We left this world?”

“Yes, of course! If I can be of service to you, Lufas, please ask me whatever you wish!” Dina replied to me with a smile as clear as a cloudless sky.

W-what a nice girl.....this girl might become my oasis in this place.

For now, I’ve gotten something I need to protect.

It's a simple thing. Cute girls are the world's treasure.

It's only natural for a man to want to protect them.

"Then, starting from those awful, hateful heroes that defeated you: after the battle they were hailed as the Seven Heroes, and they each formed their own country. Of those, four of them are already dead of old age, but three of them have long life spans, so they're still alive."

No doubt the Seven Heroes were the other famous high level players from *Exgate Online*. Each of them mastered their classes, or specialized in a gimmick, and we went hunting or boss-killing several times together. They were former comrades.

.....I wonder how they are. Are they like me, where on the inside they're players? Or not? Of course, I'd like them to be the former, but I won't be able to tell unless I see them in person.

For now, let's set meeting them again as one of my objectives while I travel around this world.

"All of the Twelve Heavenly Stars are alive and well. However, they've all scattered and spread after you were defeated, and right now, I only know where six of them are. Out of those, two of them have sided with the devil king as revenge against humankind for having beaten you."

The Twelve Heavenly Stars..... Their official title was The Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, and they were NPCs or companion monsters.

One of the classes I'd mastered was 'Monster Tamer,' which gave me a skill to tame any monsters I'd defeated with a certain chance of success. Of course, once they became friendly their stats and data were changed from when they were wild. But for a Monster Tamer, who had almost no ability to fight themselves, taming strong monsters was a matter of life and death.

And I was.....very lucky.

I'd gotten boss monsters that only appeared in events and rare monsters that basically never spawned at all. I managed to tame extremely rare high level monsters, and because of that I got full of myself and named the twelve strongest of them generals under Lufas, giving them the title of 'Twelve

Heavenly Stars.'

For big bosses, it's cooler to have strong subordinates with titles like 'The Four Divine Kings.'

There was a time when I thought like that.

Anyway, please try not to pry into that stuff. It was a mistake of my youth.

.....Well, to be honest, there are also things other than monsters mixed in, but that doesn't matter right now.

"The devil king, huh.....? My my, even if this was brought on by our own worthlessness, they've done something quite shameful, haven't they? We will have to fix this promptly."

And one more goal for the trip. That is, to round up all the Twelve Heavenly Stars, and take responsibility and stop them if they're doing something stupid.

Man, to be honest, it's actually causing me stomach problems just thinking about how monsters I've tamed and raised are causing trouble. I'm gonna have to stop them, even if I have to beat them up a little, won't I?

"Hm.....Dina, for the three heroes that are still alive as well as the Twelve Heavenly Stars that you know of, are you able to put their locations on a map?"

"Yes, certainly."

For now, I'm going to see whether or not the heroes are the same as I am. And if the Twelve Heavenly Stars are doing something stupid, I'll stop them and return them to the tower. Let's make this the goal of my travels for now.

.....Ahh, right.

And I need money, too. It's going to be really important to earn some money, since I've got nothing at the moment. I'm gonna have to find some way to make money, fast.

"It's done. I've drawn their locations on this map, please take a look."

"Hm."

I took the paper from Dina and looked at the map. Looking at the heroes first, the closest one to this tower was in the country of Svel, 1400km to the north.

That was the location of the elven hero, Megrez. And right next to Svel, at the base of a nearby volcano, was one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars: the Ram, Aries. He'd built a fort and was currently repeating attempts to invade the country.

.....What the hell is that sheep doing?

Anyway, this is probably best as our first destination.

I'll get an ulcer if I don't stop that dumbass sheep.

Oh man, prospects are grim, aren't they? But it's true there's a part of me that thinks this'll be interesting.

Now then, let's start by earning some money to travel with, why don't we?

There was a town named Trade City Ydalir. It was to the east of the country of Laevateinn, and was an independent city that didn't belong to any country. It was perfectly placed, right in the middle of all the most influential countries, and, thanks to that, lots of merchants and travelers gathered within its walls, making it a city where money rained from the skies. Adventurers weren't an exception to this, and, to be honest, this city was where all new characters spawned.

This world was two hundred years after the game I knew, but it seemed that Ydalir never changed, at least in its liveliness. I was just a little relieved that a place I knew still existed.

Yeah, I feel like I can get pretty familiar with this place.

".....Dina, it is very hard to move."

"Please bear with it. You're famous. You don't want to draw too much attention, right?"

I was wandering around the familiar city with a cloak hiding my entire body in a style that could only be described as that of a suspicious person with the dubiousness factor in full force. I wrapped my wings, which were in the way, around my body and had the cloak worn over that so as to forcefully hide my identity. The idea was proposed by Dina. On top of that, the cloak that I was wearing—the one that I came back to this world with—was conveniently equipped with a hood.

Yeah, uh, it's true that this hides my identity. But you know, looking like this just makes me seem even more suspicious and draws more attention. And my wings are getting in the way of my body, so I basically can't move my arms at all.

What the hell is this? Some kind of new kink?

"Now then, Mistress Lufas. You said you wanted to earn money for your travels first, but honestly speaking, this is going to be really difficult. After all, your face is too well-known, so it'll be hard to find work. There really aren't any people that would consider hiring the Black-Winged Tyrant."

".....That was two hundred years ago. There should not be that many that still remember our face; this world does not even have photographs."

"That's far too naive, Miss Lufas! This trade city is a place where many countries and people gather. Among those are elves, with their extremely long life spans. People like that still remember you clearly."

I nodded in understanding in response to Dina's statement.

Now that she mentions it, there were races like that in this world. Or rather, I myself am like that, a cheater creature with a huge life span, most of which is considered the prime of my life.

In the first place, the heaven-winged are said to be a race derived from angels, who were god's messengers. I don't know if it's because of that, but our lives are long, with the average life span being a ridiculous 1500 years. The fact that I still look the same after two hundred years is because of that.

By the way, in flavor Lufas was 275 years old when she was beaten, so now I'm 475. In human years, I was 14 when I was sealed, and now I'm 24.On the outside, I look like a 15-17 year old girl, though.

"Especially those black wings. Even those who don't know about you know what black wings mean. It's the worst, forbidden color to the heaven-winged, after all."

"Having black wings is still within the realm of normal, no? In fact, they should be considered rather plain."

I'll repeat, the heaven-winged are said to be descendants of angels. Even the race themselves believe this, and because of that they pride themselves on clean, pure-white wings.

It was even said that pure-white wings were proof of being heaven-winged, and among said race attractiveness is actually decided based on the color of a person's wings rather than their face or body. In fact, courting between men and women starts with showing each other their wings.

Speaking honestly, even a complete fatass uggo with acne all over and the fattest lips with smelly breath and wearing an anime girl t-shirt would be considered a hot guy if he had pure-white wings. But on the opposite side, even somebody with a perfect body and face would be considered ugly if their wings weren't white enough.

My pitch-black wings immediately place me out of the question. They completely blow away any consideration of my other features; I'd just be treated as a monster.

In human terms.....let's see. It's like if someone had green skin, no eyebrows, and antennae or feelers coming out of their forehead. Something like that.

It wasn't even a matter of looks anymore; they won't even look at you as a member of the same race. Of course, I knew that already, and made Lufas with black wings with full knowledge.

The reason was simple. "Isn't it cool to have forbidden wings?"That was it.

Of course, there was a mountain of other players who felt the same way, and pitch-black wings weren't uncommon at all in the game. In fact, black wings were actually downright decent compared to some other designs such as golden wings, or a set where each wing was a different color. The worst ones even had each feather a different color. And once you consider all that.....well, black wings just weren't that conspicuous anymore.

If I stand out badly, then what if there was one with rainbow-colored wings here? That's what I start thinking.

"It's not normal at all! I'm begging you, realize how special you are already!"

“Ahhh, okay okay. We understand, so don’t yell.” Dina got mad, so I shrugged.

Oh man, so I guess, unlike in the game, black wings are really that different, huh? This is probably going to get pretty inconvenient.

“Geez..... Then, getting back on topic, there is just one job that will hire even you without questions.”

“Indeed. That would be adventuring—or in other words, selling your life, right?”

“Yes. That won’t require any sort of standing. As long as you have your body, anybody can become one.”

Adventurers, people who sold their life for bargain-bin prices. You didn’t need anything special to start being one. Neither money nor status mattered, and even villains or slaves could get jobs.

In exchange, there was absolutely no guarantee of safety. If something were to happen, even if you were to lose your arms or legs or even die, neither your employers nor the organization would take any responsibility.

And on top of that, you’d be considered the lowest in social castes. It was a job for homeless people with nowhere to go or jobless people with nothing to do. A job for the weakest in society, for the people who don’t even know if they’ll be able to eat tomorrow. Those people all started with dreams of making it big in one stroke before meeting their ends instead and dying like dogs.

Adventuring was just that kind of job.

In the game it was easy to do since you’d just revive right afterwards, and such a dark background was just that, background. In fact, almost all players started off making money by being an adventurer, and the number of adventurers easily exceeded tens or even hundreds of thousands.

What about being the lowest caste of society, you say?Well, NPCs will curse you out a little. So what? But this is reality. Dying is the end, and cruel situations that don’t occur in the game will probably happen here.

.....Will I be fine? This body is Lufas Maphaahl’s, so I don’t think I’ll die, even if I play around a little. But will I be able to stand the sight of blood myself? Will I,

who can't even look at a cat or crow that's been run over, be able to fight? To be honest, I'm nothing but worried.

"We're here."

Urged on by Dina, I entered the building.

It was a slightly dirty bar, and the entire building was made of wood. The first floor was a cafeteria, and there were several tables installed. There were people sitting here and there who I could tell were clearly thugs just from a glance at their ugly mugs.

When we entered, all the men focused their beast-like gazes on Dina. They were probably wary of the suspicious intruder right next to her (me), so no one approached us, though.

"Hm, this air that is the very definition of a cesspool... How nostalgic."

"Now that you mention it, you were an adventurer before founding your country, weren't you, Lufas?"

—Hm? Didn't I say something weird just now, as if it was natural? Nostalgic..... No, well, it's true this is probably nostalgic...

As I said before, most players started off as adventurers. I wasn't an exception, and I fulfilled several quests in my time.

But.....right, 'I've' never been to this bar. But I still feel like it's nostalgic.

Oh no, as I thought, my memories and Lufas' memories are mixing together a little.

"Welcome. What'll it be? Or do you want a room?"

"We want an adventuring job."

".....You for real, girl?" The owner of the place, an inhospitable-looking bald guy, looked at Dina in doubt.

She was clearly thin and didn't look the least bit suited for violence. It's true that if she said that she'd be an adventurer, the first thing you'd do is doubt her sanity. But Dina cheerfully laughed in the face of that reaction and said it was fine.

“I’m not the one who will be taking the job, this person will.”

“Hmmm, this red mantle over here?Well, that’s probably fine. Then for now, come to the back, why don’t you? I want to see how good you are.”

Adventurers were people who could die at any moment. Still, if everyone died without completing the job, the one who gave them the job in the first place would have their reputation plummet. Once rumors started going around saying things like, “Don’t post any requests you have at that inn there, you won’t get anyone good,” you’d stop getting any business. That’s why the agent tested your ability like this.

.....Or, that’s what Dina whispered into my ear.

When I came to the back of the inn like I was told to do, the owner was there with several stone statues. Each of the statues looked the same: a nice guy with a beard.

That’s a stone golem made by an Alchemist, right?

Alchemist was a class that allowed you to spend materials to make a lot of different gear and tools, of which golems were one. They were NPCs that could fight on their own and were reliable friends to those who traveled solo. Their strength depended on the materials used and the skill level of the maker, and they’d turn out exactly the same given the same conditions.

There was also no way to recover their HP outside of an Alchemist’s “Repair” skill, and once the golem was destroyed, it was over for that golem.

On top of that, there was a problem where the AI picked its targets on its own, so it could end up attacking something you didn’t want to attack. They were convenient, but not something to be used frequently until higher levels.

I also made a lot of golems to inflate my armies during that final battle, but I remembered them being torn apart like paper by the other high level players.

“I’ll have you fight these golems here. I’ll be judging your skills based on how many you beat and how long it takes.”

“Hm, that sounds fine,” I replied and took a step forward.

On top of it being hard to move because of the cloak, my wings were wrapped

over my arms, so I couldn't use them. To be honest, it was quite the handicap, but.....well, it's probably fine.

In the worst case, I can just let my level difference speak for me and use Pressure, but most likely, I should be able to get through with just kicks.

"You ready?"

"You may start any time."

"Right. Then I'll turn them on," the owner said, and the golems' eyes lit up.

At the same time, I activated a Ranger skill, "Observing Eye." It was a simple but convenient skill that allowed me to see the opponent's level and remaining HP. And if the level difference was large enough, I could also see their stats.

The golems' stats were revealed, and they were:

【Stone Golem】

【Level】: 5

【Race】: Artificial Life Form

【HP】: 68

【SP】: 0

【STR (Strength)】: 73

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 36

【VIT (Vitality)】: 80

【INT (Intelligence)】: 5

【AGI (Agility)】: 27

【MND (Mind)】: 5

【LUK (Luck)】: 40

Hm, well it's a small fry, just like it looks.

With this level, even adventurers just starting the game can easily beat it after

leveling for about thirty minutes. It's not hard to get stronger than it in even just one battle if a high level player is helping you fight a strong monster.

And there's five of them..... It does seem like there's no point to these golems other than helping measure one's ability.

In fact, it'd probably be better to quit the game if you lose to these.

.....Ahh, I should check my stats too, just in case.

To be honest, the level difference is so high it's hard to tell how far I should hold back.

【Lufas Maphaahl】

【Level】: 1000

【Race】: Heaven-Winged

【Class Levels】

- Warrior: 100
- Swordmaster: 100
- Grappler: 100
- Champion: 100
- Monster Tamer: 100
- Alchemist: 100
- Ranger: 100
- Strider: 100
- Acolyte: 100
- Priest: 50
- Esper: 50

【HP】: 335000

【SP】: 17430

【STR (Strength)】: 9200

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 8750

【VIT (Vitality)】: 10300

【INT (Intelligence)】: 8300

【AGI (Agility)】: 10778

【MND (Mind)】: 9550

【LUK (Luck)】: 9280

【Equipment】:

【Head】: —

【Right arm】: —

【Left arm】: —

【Body】: Queen of Heaven's Dress

- Status condition nullification

- HP regeneration

【Legs】: Swift Horse Boots

- Field movement speed up

【Other】: Cloak of Seven Days

- Halve all elemental damage

Yeah, this is just bullying the weak at this point.

By the way, you're not imagining that my stats are weird.

Levels themselves are maxed out at 1000, but stats have no limit. In other words, you can raise your stats as high as you want with doping items. They're all rare items, but outside of a small portion of them, they're not that impossible to get. Especially the HP stat item. Thanks to that one being relatively easy to get, my HP is pretty high.

I digress, but for heaven-winged, without doping items but with the same class levels, at level 1000 they'd be at around 70,000 HP. Now that you know

that, you should be able to tell just how far I boosted my HP.

Of course, it's not quite at the level of bosses you'd be expected to fight at max level, but I know it's higher than most bosses you'll find out in the world. Being called "The Wild Last Boss" definitely wasn't for show.

While we're on the subject, I'll explain about "Levels" and "Class Levels" too. "Levels" are just what it says on the tin. They're a stat that's already a given in RPGs, and they're raised by fighting to gain a certain amount of experience. The max level is 1000, and it's impossible to go further than that. Even boss characters adhere to this absolute rule of Exgate.

Next are "Class Levels." These indicate the levels in a class you've acquired, and classes go up to 100. Raising class levels happens at the same time as regular levels. The class you have at the moment you level up is the one that's raised, and it affects the stats you get for leveling up, so it's pretty important.

For example, if you want to play a front line character, but you spend all your time in rear line character classes, before long your stats will be far and away from being suited to being on the front line. That kind of situation is quite possible.

I feel like that part of the game is a lot like a tabletop RPG. You can really tell that the previous game of the line was a TRPG.

And once you reach the maximum level of 100 in a class, you'll get a message saying, "Your class level is 100. Please change classes." And from then on, until you change classes, you won't gain any levels no matter how much you fight.

There's two ways around that.

The first is to do as the message says and change classes. By repeating this, the player will eventually get to level 1000, and with ten classes under their belt, their character will be complete.

Of course, there's no need to follow the same class until level 100. For example, I've only raised my Priest and Esper levels to 50 each, forcing my number of classes to 11.

The other method is to pay for it. By paying real money, you can raise a class's max level to 200 and can keep leveling that class as is. However, in exchange,

there'll be basically no new skills to learn. Most skills for a class are learned by level 100, so basically the only merit of continuing in the same class is stat gains.

For example, staying as a Swordmaster or a Grappler for the whole 200 levels will get your attack and HP stats higher than most other front liners, which is the biggest reason to pay. Also, some skills scale with class level, so there are a lot of people that pay to get to 200 because of that.

Other than that, let's see.....some classes will unlock a secret class or skill by getting it to level 200, it seems, but most of them haven't been discovered. People say that, most likely, you won't find that stuff unless you level your character pretty stupidly.

Anyway, that doesn't matter right now. For now, it's time for my first fight since I found myself in this body. I see no reason for this fight to be any trouble, but for now let's try some stuff out.

One of the golems swung its arm at me.

—I was at max wariness, wondering what kind of attack would be coming, but I lost a lot of my tension seeing the speed of the attack.

—It's slow. No, it's way too slow.

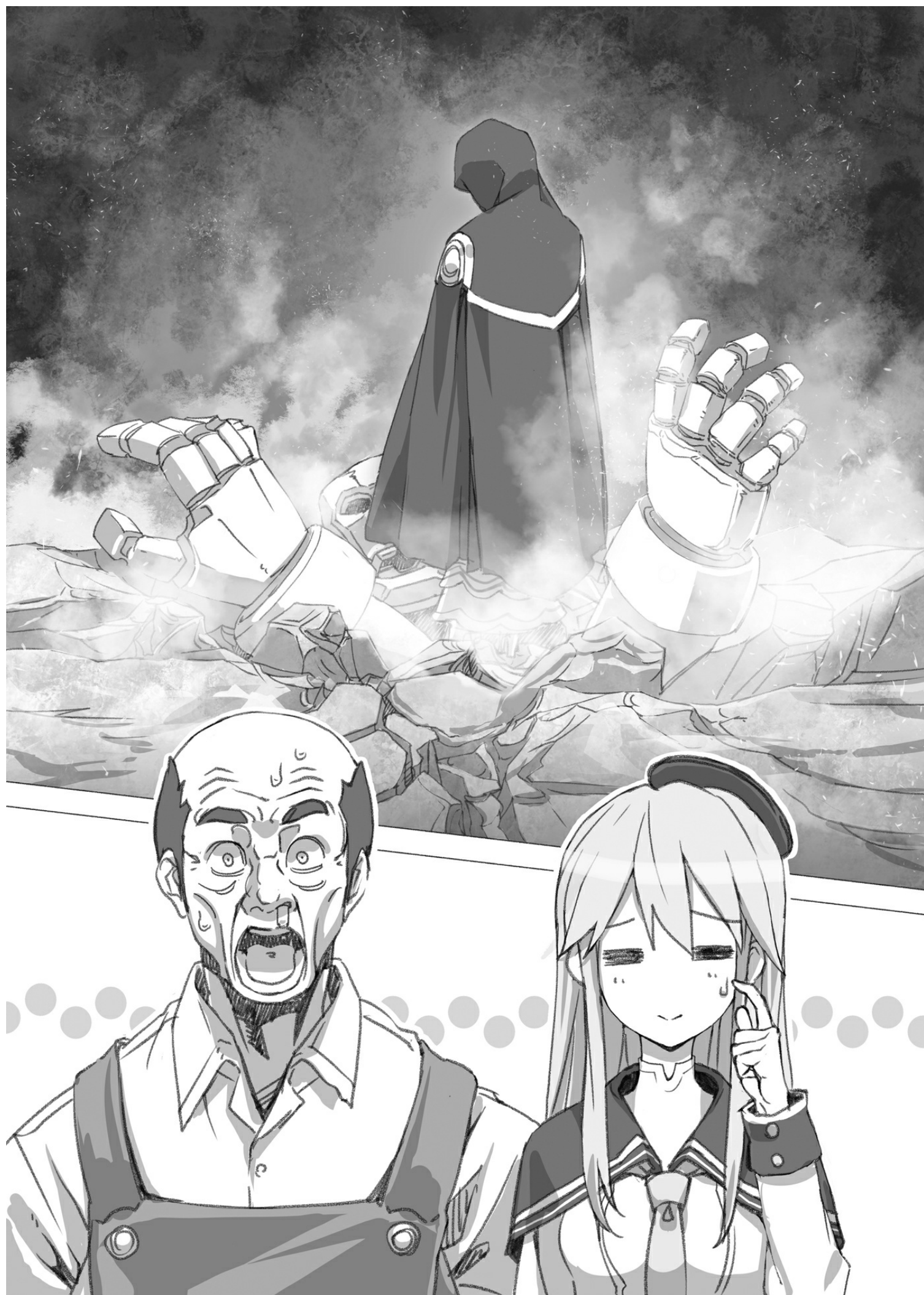
What the hell? Is this like a lucky hero's lucky punch from a certain manga that came out a while back? This is exactly what people mean when they say time stops. With how slow things are, I feel like time is stopped, and I can do anything.

What's with these sluggish, unmotivated movements?Am I being underestimated?

“What dull golems.”

I couldn't stop myself from voicing my displeasure, and with a light jump I got on top of the golem. Then, with about 10% of my power, I stomped on it.

When it died, the golem was crushed flat like it was made of paper and completely lost its previous form.



.....S-so brittle. Way too brittle. A cardboard box is harder than that.

I pulled out my leg, which was buried in the ground up to the knee, and glanced at the owner.

.....I don't really care, but isn't this ground too soft?

"Owner. There is no need to hold back. Can you not make these things move even a little more realistically?"

".....Huh? Wha-, huh.....? N-no way..... The g-golem was squished in an instant? W-what just happened.....?"

".....Could it be, you didn't see what happened?"

I thought that the golem was slow and brittle. But from the way the owner reacted, it appears that I'm wrong.

Ahh, I see. I am wrong.

It's not that the golems were too slow or too brittle. It's just that once I start concentrating for battle, I'm too strong and too fast. Our perceptions of time were far too different.

"We see.....in other words, that was their all?"

Those golems were level 5. And level 5's were newbie adventurers.....or in this world, just strong enough to live on their own.

On the other hand, I'm level 1000. And I'm especially confident in my speed.

In the end, their fastest just looked slow to me, and the difference in perception of time was enough that it was actually hard to try to get hit on purpose. It was the same in the game, where, if the difference in speed was too much, even just standing there like a log will cause attacks to miss.

The fight between me and the golem was just like that.

"This won't do at all."

I lightly kicked the second golem apart. It felt like I was kicking tofu. They fell apart so easily it was actually hard to tell if I defeated them or not.

—Ahh, this is.....this isn't a fight anymore. It's just a match of attrition I'm

guaranteed to win. This is just a farce that gives me no sense of accomplishment, like accidentally walking over a bug.

But still, this is a test, so I have to do it.

I had no idea what, if anything, could be measured by me doing this work that just involved wastefully breaking things, but I still kicked apart the remaining three golems.

I only moved leisurely and listlessly, like kicking a stone on the side of the road, but even then the golems didn't even manage to look like they were trying to dodge and broke disappointingly, without any form of resistance.

Before, I was thinking of this as 'my first battle in this body,' but let me correct that now. I still haven't 'fought' in this body at all.

"T-too quick.....too strong..... Y-you, just what....." The owner, in shock, shot me a look filled with fear.

Oh no, looks like I made a mistake. It's not good that I garnered this much attention to myself right now..... Oh well, it's already done. Let's take this as a lesson and be more careful next time.

"Wait a second, Lufas, that was too much! Unlike two hundred years ago, power levels are a lot lower, so you'll just scare people if you don't hold back more!" Dina ran over and whispered her complaints into my ear.

Actually, this is the first I'm hearing of levels being a lot lower than two hundred years ago.

Wouldn't that be something you tell me earlier, usually?

"Ahh, sorry about that, Dina. It really does seem that We have lost some of our instincts in these two hundred years. We made a mistake on how much to hold back."

"Geez, be more careful next time."

I should have used only around 10% of my power, but apparently even that was too much. I guess I should settle it with a flick to the forehead next time for opponents like that. Ah, but I can't move my arms right now, so that won't work.I guess I just have to move as slow as I can and kick as lightly as

possible.

Still, it's weird.

It's not like I see people moving that slowly normally. But it becomes like that the moment I start thinking of things as a battle. In other words, I'm smoothly transitioning between normal operation and battle mode, but is that really something I can do myself? Could it be.....I'm being helped by Lufas' instincts?

"So, how is it, owner? I think her abilities are more than enough."

"Ah, yeah.....you're right. You'll be able to take on any job without a problem. Jobs are posted up in the bar so just take what you like."

Now that we'd gotten permission from the owner, Dina and I went back inside. And we took a look at the jobs that were posted on the wall, but none of them really stood out to me. To put it bluntly, I didn't feel like doing too many of these jobs. I wanted one where I could make a lot of money in a single go.

I wanted to hurry up and get to Svel.

The best one would be an escort request from here to Svel or something similar. That way we could get to Svel while actually earning money.

I could just fly there by myself, but if I did that I'd leave Dina behind. But with a carriage, even she could be easily carted around.

.....or that's what I thought.

"There's nothing good."

"Nothing."

There were escort jobs on carriages, but they all went to Laevateinn. Far from going to Svel, it was in the opposite direction.

Unfortunately, there weren't any jobs like what I was hoping for.

"Ah, Miss Lufas. What about this one?"

"Hm?" Dina was holding a piece of paper, so I looked at it.

【Request: Finding a cat】

【Difficulty】: ☆☆

【Reward】: 100 el per found cat

【The twelve cats that we were keeping disappeared. Please find them!】

“It’s 1200 el just for finding twelve cats! It’s a steal!”

“Ahh, yeah, it certainly is a good deal...” 1200 el for being decent at finding cats.....it was true that that was a good deal.

El was the name of the currency in this world, and, translated to Japanese yen, a single el would be 200 yen. In other words, completing this would net us 240,000 yen.

They must either really love cats or be nobles with the money to spare. Either way, I’m jealous of how much they have to spend.

In addition, although I said that one el was the equivalent of 200 yen, that was just in-game fluff. In actuality, it was very much the opposite.

This was completely natural, as comparing game money to real money would obviously result in real money winning. Between an item a player paid 10,000 el for and one that cost 500 yen, the latter would always be clearly stronger.

The world is a tough place.

“Let’s not. We are not good at searching for things. That is the realm of beastmen.”

“Th-then how about this one?”

【Request: Orc Slaying】

【Difficulty】: ☆☆☆☆

【Reward】: 1500 el

【An orc nest was built near our village, and they’re causing problems, doing as they please. Please help us.】

“Oh? This one is pretty nice. Strange that no one has taken it yet.” My voice

filled with excitement, seeing the request that Dina had brought me.

Even if it wasn't a job, I'd want to hunt orcs. After all, these orcs have a high 3% chance of dropping the HP boosting item "orc meat."

Orcs—better known as pork bowls.

In the game, to players, they existed only to be eaten. They were literally pork.

Especially for those of us with maxed out levels, they were a safe and easy way of getting HP-up items, and we'd hunt orcs basically every day. It was just daily routine to destroy whole nests. There would even be people camped out by orc spawn points just waiting patiently for more to respawn.

Because of that, in the game, orcs became a rare monster that was almost never seen in the wild. Any orcs that managed to take even a step out of their respawn points could already be considered heroes to their race.

Of course, there'd be no way they'd ever be able to attack a human village. They weren't even allowed to group up; they'd be slaughtered and eaten as soon as they spawned.

Orcs were a monster that was so worth killing it was actually kind of sad.

For orcs to be gathered into a whole herd and attack humans..... This request is actually almost moving.

"Well, that's because there's no merit to it."

"What? Orc hunting by itself should be a merit, no?"

"Well, that would be the case for you, but in this age, that's not true. After all, even a single orc is as strong as an average veteran warrior, so having to exterminate a whole nest would be difficult and require an entire knight brigade. And even then, there'd probably be a lot of casualties. And after taking on all that, you only get 1500 el? No one would take it."

"Times really do change, huh?Back then, rather than complaining about 1500 el, there'd be floods of people that would pay 15,000 to even be able to take the job." I sighed in disappointment, exasperated at the difference to the game.

To me, hunting orcs was nothing but merit. Rather than taking money for it, I was even thinking I'd pay to be able to do it. And since I'd be getting paid on top of getting to hunt, it was as if I not only got the right to eat as much amazing steak as I wanted but was told, "If you eat steak, I'll give you 30,000 yen."

The deal was so good I could only assume that something was up.

"So this means.....it is all right to completely destroy this orc nest?"

"Of course."

"Right. Let us take this one. There is no way We can let this opportunity go. We can earn both money and food before going on our journey."

"Yaayyy, so it's back to the ice ages for orcs, huh? I probably shouldn't be saying this since I brought you the posting myself, but I feel sorry for the orcs."

I can get paid, get a lot of meat, and even raise my HP. If I let this go, I'm a failure of a max level player.

Without a second thought, I took the paper to the owner and told him I'd be taking the job before leaving the inn.

"Oh, yes, Dina."

"Yes, what is it?"

The village which was supposedly near the orcs' nest was about half a day away from Ydalir by foot.

On the way there, I started asking Dina questions to kill time.

This world had several inconsistencies with my knowledge of it. As one might expect, two hundred years was not a small amount of time, and made a lot of difference.

"Earlier, you said that power levels now are much lower than two hundred years ago. Tell us exactly how much in a way that's easy to understand."

Two hundred years ago.....back when this was the world of the game, I was the strongest player. I was at the top of combined stat rankings, and I was confident I wouldn't lose easily to anybody.

It wasn't like I was far and away ahead of everyone else, though. In fact,

players like me were everywhere.

If I remember right, the total number of players was around eight million..... Out of that number, about 20% of players were at max level, and being max level was the lowest requirement to be considered a high ranking player. Of course, getting to level 1000 took quite a lot of work, but still, it was something you'd eventually get to by hunting every day. Just being level 1000 wasn't enough to be considered a high ranking player.

What was truly difficult and important came after that, when you were tested on just how efficiently you could get stat-raising items to get stronger now that your level wasn't going anywhere. Doing just that and raising your stats stupidly high once you were max level was how players started to get famous as a high level player.

I figured..... *Isn't it just that people in this world basically don't use stat raising items at all anymore?* In other words, they stop growing once they reach max level, and that was the peak.

Isn't that why power levels went down?

Flying in the face of that, the response Dina gave me greatly undermined my expectations.

"Uhh, let's see..... The country that summoned you, Laevateinn, is renowned as the 'country of swords' but..... They have a person known as the 'Sword Saint' there, someone named Friedrich, who's put on a pedestal as the best swordsman in the world. I believe he's level 120."

".....120?"

"Yes, 120."

I doubted my own hearing.

Wait just a second, 120?

The world's strongest swordsman is level 120?! That's way too low!

What a guy, to call himself a Sword Saint.

There were a lot of beginner players in the game that got full of themselves and gave themselves a nickname or title when they passed level 100, but I

always just thought of them as *those* kinds of people. At the very least, get to 1000 before giving yourselves a name like that or else you'll humiliate yourself.

"That's a joke, right? There is a limit to how low your level can be."

"Excuse me, Miss Lufas. But the real joke was how unreal people in that age were. Please think about it; you only have one life. Normally, there wouldn't be very many monstrously strong people who'd be able to safely get to level 1000 without losing their lives. Even more so, people fought tooth and nail every single day until they got there; they were doing preposterous things like training endlessly without rest..... That era back then was bizarre in and of itself, with how many hero-level people like that were wandering around."

Hearing Dina's reasoning, I was once again made to realize that my perceptions were off.

I see, so that's how it is.

It was true that level 1000 was something you could only reach because it was a game. Even if your character died they just came back, and the player wasn't hurt at all.

Getting there was something that was only possible because of that..... For example, if there was a rule that said, 'If you die, you'll never be able to log in as the same character again,' almost no players would get to maxing out their levels.

Every day, without fail, spend the entire day in a fight to the death with monsters, and continue that for over a year without dying. Just how many people would be able to pull that off in real life?

If they could, they'd be lunatics. No doubt, they wouldn't be normal.

In other words, thinking normally, even level 120 was an amazing feat. The person would be a superhuman that deserved a title.

I was the one that was mistaken.

"We see..... Truly, this is quite different from what We know."

In this world, I was a lunatic and a monster. I felt like that reality was thrust in front of me, and I started feeling a little empty inside.

Aisle village.

It was a small village half a day away from the Trade City Ydalir by foot, and there was nothing special about it. In Dina's words, 'it's a simple village where people live modestly.'

After leaving a patch of woods that actually wasn't all that large, there was a small, calm village that had none of the flash of a city. *I see*. There were several small, wooden houses lined up with fields in front of them.

Yep, I don't hate this atmosphere.

"The house that's indicated in the job form is..... Ah, that large one over there." Dina pointed at a conspicuously large house while looking at the piece of paper in her hand.

Even though I say big, it's not actually that large compared to anything in a city. It's just big for this village.

It was most likely the house of the village chief, and when we got to the house, Dina knocked lightly on the door.

"Excuse me! We saw your request and accepted it! Is the village chief there?"

Dina said to leave all the negotiations and planning with the client to her, so, for now, I was just luggage. She said that my manner of speaking really stands out, no matter what.

Yeah, I knew that, too, but for some reason, there was nothing I could do about it. It was as if this was how I'd been talking for many years. That was how naturally it came out.

"Ohh! I've been waiting so long! Here, here, come on in." The one who came to the door was a kind-looking, white-haired old man.

Seeing me, he looked doubtful for a moment, but even so, he must have had his back to the wall, since he didn't say anything about it and invited us in.

The inside was obviously in disrepair in some places, and I could see some traces of hasty repairs and reinforcement. The floor creaked loudly; it was like the state of the floor was a direct representation of how the village was doing as a whole.

“Please, take a seat.”

I was shown a seat, so I sat down on a really unreliable wooden chair. I was worried that it would break at any moment, but it was holding up for now, somehow. If I were a beastkin or something it'd be over, though. Definitely.

“Now then, let's get into it quickly. The request is to exterminate a nest of orcs near the village. That's correct?”

“Yes. Even if you don't kill them all, I'll still pay you if you manage to drive them off. At any rate, if things stay like this we'll just get eaten by them and..... The young women will be taken, the men will be killed, and even the children'll be killed, half for fun..... Almost all of our crops have been stolen. We're at our limit here. Please, punish those damn pigs for us!”

“Of course!”

While listening to Dina and the village chief talk, I was actually impressed by just how refreshingly awful orcs were.

Orcs were, just like the setting in the game, and everywhere else, a race that did awful things almost instinctively, it seemed. I wanted to tell them all that that was exactly why they weren't included in the seven main races of humanity and were instead treated as monsters. Even vampires were treated as, basically, people, but when it came to those pigs.....

Anyway, since my opponent's not nice at all, it's actually going to be much easier to do this, personally. I'm thankful. At the very least, crushing all the orcs won't hurt my conscience any.

“Leave it to us. We'll crush those orcs, nest and all. You'll see! At least, this person will!” Dina pointed to me with a smug face.

She was saying brave things, but in the end, she's just leaving it all to someone else. Well, actually, fighting is my job, though, so I'll just shut up and nod.

The village chief was making a face like he wanted to ask if I could actually do it, but there should be no complaints as long as I complete the job.

“P-please. Please save our village,” the village chief said before bowing

deeply.

After being begged like that, there's no way we could refuse. We didn't have any intention to do so in the first place, but now, I'm even more motivated.

After Dina and I promised to crush the orcs, we left.

"Now what? Should we just go in swinging?"

"That's a fine idea, too, but first, we must prepare. We cannot be sure that orcs will not attack this place while we are gone."

Most likely, crushing the nest won't be a problem. In the end, the difference in our stats is just too much. No matter how much I let my guard down as I fight, there's most likely no way for me to lose.

Still, if the orcs come this way while we're busy getting to the nest, it's still our loss if the village chief gets killed in the meantime. If the employer dies, there's no way for us to get paid.

"So, We are going to make a guardian."

"A guardian?"

"Yes, a simple golem. It won't be very strong, but it should be more than enough to stop orcs," I explained to Dina before using a random rock I found to create a stone golem with my Alchemist skills.

A golem's strength depended on the creator's class level, the formula being: $[\text{character's overall level}/2 + \text{class level}]$ with any fractions being ignored.

For example, if a character's overall level was 20 and their class level was 5, then the golem's level would be $[20/2 + 5]$, which comes out as level 15. And if their class level was 20, then the golem's level would be 30 and stronger than the creator.

In other words, low level players could make golems up to 15 times their level. It could be said that golems were an Alchemist's main strength during the early game.

However, even though class levels were limited to 100, overall level could get to 1000. Meaning that the higher leveled you got, the less useful golems became.

In short, if I were to make a golem, it would be, at best, level 600, given the formula: $[1000/2 + 100]$. On top of that, the materials are also a factor that sets the golem's maximum attainable level. With good materials, I can achieve a level 600 golem, but unfortunately, with just a random rock, I'd be lucky to see level 100..... Honestly, it's not something that'd be useful to me.

But still, as a guardian for this village, it'll probably be fine.

"No no, it's more than fine. A level 100 golem is worth I don't know how many millions of el right now, you know?!"

"That price, for something We just made out of a random rock....."

For now, I set it as a guardian. Before leaving, I gave it a simple order, that being to render any orcs that come near the village immobile without question.

We went straight for the orc nest.

The aim? Orc meat that raises HP.

We walked to where the orc nest was indicated on the map, trampling wild grass flat beneath our feet.

I understood where they were immediately. It was indicated on the map, but more than anything, they weren't hiding at all.

There were two orcs boldly talking in front of a cave. They seemed to be guards of a sort, but honestly, their wariness level was a straight 0. They were acting boldly, as if they didn't expect to be harmed in any way. Not even a little.

"There they are. Agh, they're so ugly every time I see them..... I bet even the goddess Alovenus regrets these failures."

"You have quite the poisonous tongue, don't you? Apparently, she's a goddess that loves everything equally, according to the clergy, anyway."

"That's just a lie. They're pushing their delusions onto her. There's no doubt, even the goddess has her favorites."

While listening to Dina criticizing orcs, I thought about how I was going to kill them all.

1: Go straight in and kick them to death.

Honestly, there's no need to be afraid of them at all. Even if I went straight in without trying to hide, I could probably win easily. But I don't know how many orcs I might let escape if I do things like this.

2: Use my skills as an Alchemist to crush the nest itself.

I think this is the safest route. I can't use any attack magic, but with Alchemist skills, large-scale attacks aren't impossible. But doing it like this destroys the nest, so I don't know how many pieces of orc meat'll get buried in the rubble, never to be found.

3: Use my skills to their limits to assassinate everyone before they even get a chance to scream.

Doing things this way, I won't have to worry about anyone running away, and there's no chance of not being able to get all the orc meat that drops. I'm not sure how this would look, a Great Conqueror going this far against just orcs, but the meat comes first.

I don't know how many of them are in there, but given the drop rates, if there're at least fifty I should get at least one or two pieces. And if there're about one hundred, I should be able to get three. Orc meat raises HP between 100-300 per piece at random, so at the very least, I'll get 300 HP with three pieces.

.....Kinda eh? Not at all. Repeating this several times definitely stacks up.

"Now then, let's get this over with quickly."

"Go for it, Miss Lufas!"

I started creating some items using my Alchemist skills. The material was the dirt itself, and the end product was swords.

For now, I went with a light thirty swords, and I used the Esper skill "Psycho Throw" to make them float.

To be honest, I was far better at close combat, and out of my maxed out classes, four of them were specialized for close combat. No, Striders are pretty heavy on close combat, too, so I guess five?

On the other hand, since I couldn't use attack magic, I ended up being not

that great at long-distance fights. I didn't even take the Archer class, and I've only gone halfway through the Esper class, with it being level 50.

But still, comboed with the Alchemist class, I could hold my own, somewhat.

The Alchemist's item creation skill, just like it said, was able to make items out of materials that were either on hand or just happened to be around. The range of creatable items was wide, from healing items to equipment, and, depending on how materials are used or combined, you could make an almost infinite number of different kinds of equipment.

This time, I just created normal broadswords, but my class level was 100, so if I wanted to, I couldn't make a legendary weapon, but I *could* make something close in ability.

And Espers were just what it implied, a psychic powers class. Espers could bind people or move things around without having to get near them. "Psycho Throw" was the biggest example of that, and it allowed me to launch my items at enemies.

I believe there was a nationally famous RPG in the past with skills like "Throw Item" or "Throw Zenny;" just think of it as something like that.

This skill worked really well comboed with the Alchemist class, and it allowed you to kind of feel like a last boss yourself when you started shooting countless swords at your enemies with your arms crossed.

All thirty swords flew at the orcs on watch, and they pierced through their heads, chopped through their necks, ran their hearts through, and cut off their arms and legs. They were filled with swords in an instant, and the orcs, which now looked like hedgehogs, didn't even twitch.

I walked out of the bushes and extracted the swords with my psychokinesis before starting to take the orcs apart.

.....Huh? Could it be this isn't a 3% drop chance, but instead something I could just get if I butchered them?

"Ahh..... That's no good, Miss Lufas. You ruined the fillet. The orc's fillet—or the softest part inside it—is the part that increases your vitality, but if you damage it even a little while it's alive, it loses its effect."

“Hm? Really?”

“Of course. Although, orcs already fight a lot, so a lot of times their fillets are already damaged. It’s said that the chances of the fillet still being undamaged, as well as leaving it that way when fighting, is about 3%.Did you forget about all that while you were sealed?”

After hearing Dina’s explanation, I was impressed.

I see, that’s why it’s 3%. So, the drop rates in the game that I didn’t really pay any attention to had this sort of reasoning behind them. That’s pretty interesting. And now that I know this, that means that if I do well in defeating it I can raise the chances of getting them depending on my skill.

“That’s very useful. We shall be more careful from now on.”

I did something wasteful just now. Turning them into hedgehogs like this, there was no way there’d be any part of them left to salvage. Of course, the fillet wasn’t an exception. Unfortunately, while it seemed these orcs could still be food, they wouldn’t be raising my HP.

“Also, orcs are very hardy, so I don’t recommend hitting their bodies in the first place. Aim for their neck or head, Miss Lufas.”

“Understood. You’re quite knowledgeable, Dina.”

A single orc came out of the cave, saying, “It’s time to change watch,” so I used a single sword to quickly lop off its head.

Dina clapped lightly in response, saying, “Well done.”

I once again butchered the new orc, and this time, I found a nice and pretty undamaged fillet.

“Look, Dina. This time, We got one.”

“As expected! Good job!”

If it was just ‘me,’ I definitely wouldn’t have been able to look at an R-18 butchering scene directly or even kill another living thing. It’s probably not right to just be thankful for my situation when it’s convenient like this, but right now, I’m glad I have Lufas’ senses.

Now then, there's still a mountain of orcs around. For the job, let's make sure none of them get away.

"Wha—? Who the hell're—..... Guaahh!"

"I-Intru—..... Grraaaggh!"

"Someone sent from that vi—..... Gyaagghh!"

"Heh, good job making it this far! I am the strongest of the orcs' Four Heavenly Kings..... Nnwhaaaggh!"

"W-wait! Please, spare m—..... Hhgyaaahhhh!"

I suppose it should've been called a massacre. Corpses of orcs trailed behind me everywhere I walked, and orcs that were about to be corpses were arrayed in front of me.

Thinking this would be a good chance to do it, I was going to try out a bunch of skills, but doing it here wouldn't tell me anything. I mean, no matter what skill I used, they all died instantly anyway. Like this, I wouldn't be able to tell just how powerful each skill was.

"Dina, how is it over there?"

"This one is.....no good. It's a miss."

After extracting each orc's fillet and checking it to see if it was good, I was taking any usable fillets and keeping them in my bag. Anything else was being unexpectedly cleaned up by Dina.

Apparently, she could use teleportation magic, and she was moving all the orcs to the tower, since we couldn't very well carry them.

Dina said, "Once this is over, I'll go back to the tower for a bit and make them into examp—.....I mean, dried meat."

So apparently, that's how it is. Man, I'm so lucky to have an actual, useful advisor.

Anyway, there was a little too much of it, even if it was made into dried meat, so apparently, most of it would be sold in markets after being processed. I'd leave all of that to her.

“This is the deepest part, isn’t it?”

I kicked open the door and went in.

The orc near the entrance got up, surprised, but I just stabbed him through the head with a sword I created before moving on, stabbing through the different-colored orc that was panicking and trying to run away further in.

The only ones that dropped orc meat were regular orcs. So that meant I didn’t have to care about the different-colored one, the orc lord. Countless swords stabbed through him, and he died without even being able to scream.

“So, that’s all of them, right?”

“Most likely.”

After hearing Dina’s reply, I breathed a small sigh of relief. That meant the job was finished.....

I killed quite a lot, but as always, I’m not bothered at all. It’s as if this is just an extension of my daily life; that’s how calm I am. Even if I manage to go back—if I can go back, that is—I don’t know how I’ll be if I stay like this. Not thinking anything of killing, that’s way too scary a thing in modern Japan.

“Uhhh, the girls who were taken..... Oh, there they are.” Dina looked around and found a cage.

No, is that really a cage?

It was true that they were in something made so they couldn’t run away. That was for certain. But there was furniture, they were properly wearing clothes, and there were even gems and flowers and stuff in the cage.

The women were all sleeping with faces clinched tight in fear, but at the very least, it didn’t seem like anything had happened to them yet. Actually, it looked like they were being properly cared for.

And that was to be expected. In truth, orcs weren’t violent towards women (and only women); they were a very kind creature in that respect.

People thought that as soon as they kidnapped a woman off the streets, they’d immediately do them, but it was actually different in this world. Orcs would kidnap women. That much was certain and for a very compelling reason

—to reproduce. Somehow, they always made males, no matter what they did. It was a sad flaw of their genes, so they had no other recourse but to mate with women of other races.

And for that, they only went for human women. Since, out of all the races of humanity, human women were the only ones they could mate with.

Elves? Orcs wouldn't even give them the time of day. And?

But it didn't just end with orcs taking women and mating. They were, at their roots, barbaric beings that only knew violence since birth, so they couldn't even raise children properly. That was why they needed the women they took to raise their children properly, and if they forcefully raped or even displeased the women, of course they wouldn't bother with raising children.

For orcs, that was a huge problem.

That was why they always tried to make sure women were happy, no matter what. The women lived better than they did themselves; they were given a lot of food, and they even got offered a veritable mountain of gems and flowers and the like. It's a lot of work, trying to keep women happy.

On top of that, they wouldn't even touch the women if they didn't have consent, and they'd stake their lives on protecting them, too. Their motives were impure, but the pigs here were relatively gentlemanly.

Still, to the people who were taken, that didn't matter one bit. Even if those pig-faces treated them well, all they'd do was live in fear.

It's sad, but in the end, they just weren't compatible with humans.

"Okay, the women are fine. Let us go back to the village."

"I can erase their memories, too. Should I do that?"

"Is that necessary?"

"I do feel that it's better for them not to remember getting kidnapped by pigs."

"Hm. How far can you go with it?"

"If I feel like it, I can implant them with fake memories and personalities."

“.....You just casually said something really scary there. Well, there’s no reason to go that far. It doesn’t seem like anything was done to them, either.”

For now, it should be fine to leave the women as they were. It was most likely a scary experience for them, but in the end, they were fine. Still, I checked that nothing was done to them, just in case.

Of course, I left that checking completely up to Dina.

I won’t do anything. Right now, I’m certainly a woman, but spiritually, I’m a man, so to put it bluntly, I have no immunity to this stuff. Actually, ever since I became a woman, I stopped being interested in that kind of stuff. Even if I look at a woman, I don’t get those kinds of feelings, and as a former man, I feel that that’s kind of sad.

.....Even I’m a healthy enough man to have some porn stashed away behind a drawer.

“Okay, I understand. Please wait a little.”

“All right. Make it as fast as possible.”

I left checking the women to Dina, while I started to explore the room. There should be some scant fortune or food to be had, which the orcs stole from the village. I should find as much as I can and return it to the village.

Well, I do feel kind of sorry for the orcs, but I really shouldn’t let this one go. I mean, robbery is robbery. I do feel sorry for them, but that doesn’t excuse anything.

After leaving the orc nest and making sure Dina and all the others were out as well, I unleashed one of my Alchemist skills at the nest itself. The cave was blameless in all this, but leaving it alone wasn’t a good idea. Other orcs might come, lured by the smell of orcs here, and if that happened, the first thing they’d do is go after the village again.

So that that didn’t happen, I had to destroy the cave as cleanly as possible.

“Create: Hrungrnir’s Right Arm,” I declared, and at the same time, a huge arm of rock manifested above the cave.

In size, it was a huge right arm that looked to be larger than 50m in length.

Among all the Alchemist's attack skills, this one was the most reliable in terms of physical attack power and range.

It mercilessly struck at the orcs' nest and crushed it flat. It made a huge boom and shook the earth, and even just the aftershocks of the action caused winds to blow.

Even if there were orcs that managed to escape my notice and hide, they should be dead now.

"Nice work, Miss Lufas. All the girls that were being held in the orc nest are safe."

"Yes, good job."

Dina, who returned via teleportation magic, stood behind me as I thanked her for her work.

No, really, I can't be thankful enough for her.

I left all the work of dealing with the orcs, preserving their meat, selling them, and even checking up on the women to her. Even though it was a game and there was nothing to be done about it, I wondered just how the "Lufas" before I became her managed to treat Dina as background.

She's so capable it's actually surprising.

"Ahh, right. I tried grilling one of these; would you like to try it? You've moved around a lot, so I think you might be hungry."

"That is....."

Dina revealed a plate from somewhere and showed it to me. On the plate was a steak that seemed almost grilled to perfection, and the smell alone stirred my appetite.

"It's a steak I made using orc meat. It'll be delicious with rice."

"Indeed, We shall have it." I agreed with no hesitation and sat down on a nearby stump.

Now that I think about it, I still haven't eaten anything ever since I was summoned here. So much has happened, so I almost forgot that it hasn't even

been one day since I came to this world.

I snapped and formed a wooden table before having Dina place the plate in front of me.

“Oh yes, does it keep its effect even if you cook it?”

“That’s fine, yes. You must only avoid damaging it while the orc is still alive. It seems that the orc’s fillet, or the softest and best part of its flesh, works to gather its vitality, but if it’s damaged while the orc is alive, it loses its effect and releases all the stored vitality into the rest of the orc. But, if the orc is dead, all the vitality stays inside the fillet.”

“What kind of mystery being are they...?”

While Dina was talking, I created a wooden fork and knife before cutting into the steak. It was surprising how soft the meat was when I touched it with the knife. It only raised my expectations before I even got to eat it.

Then, after a bite— Saying that the meat melts in your mouth is an old and clichéd expression, but now, I see; it’s so soft that’s the only way to describe it.

The meat’s umami was overwhelming, and I was rendered unable to speak. The salty-sweet sauce on the steak was absolutely irresistible as well. It wonderfully brought out the tastiness of the meat.

Unable to take it anymore, I scooped up the rice with a spoon and put it in my mouth, and it was actually fun how well the rice paired with the meat. The strong flavor of the meat mixed in with the rice changed the flavor, and they both heightened the other to new levels.

“Is this sauce homemade?”

“Yes. Did it not suit your tastes?”

“No, well done.”

I don’t think I’ll ever get tired of this meat. I prefer beef steaks, but really, you can’t just dismiss pork steaks either. Orcs look pretty awful, but if their meat is this good I feel like I can forgive that.

“Dina, you’re not eating?”

“No, I’m fine.”

“Hmm...”

Is she being considerate, since I’m here? Or maybe she just really hates orcs? Well, if she says it’s fine then I suppose I don’t really need to force it out of her. Everybody has one or two things they hate.

I finished up the orc steak, and then checked my stats.

【Lufas Maphaahl】

【Level】: 1000

【Race】: Heaven-Winged

【HP】: 335000 → 335300

【SP】: 44300

【STR (Strength)】: 9200

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 8750

【VIT (Vitality)】: 10300

【INT (Intelligence)】: 8300

【AGI (Agility)】: 10778

【MND (Mind)】: 9550

【LUK (Luck)】: 9280

Great, my HP actually went up.

This time, I managed to get another four fillets by completing the job, so at the very least, my HP would go up by another 400.

My HP was already higher than most players, but I still felt like it could go higher.

Actually, since there’s no one else competing for orcs here, I can hunt them as much as I like, so if I’m lucky, I think I might be able to break 1 million HP.

.....No, I guess that much is impossible. No matter how good it is, I don’t think

I'd be able to stand eating that much orc meat. Also, if I actually went that far, even orcs would go extinct, probably. In fact, I'm impressed they haven't done that already in these two hundred years.

"Thank you for the meal. It truly was good, Dina."

"I'm happy you enjoyed it."

After I finished the meal, Dina cleaned up the table and utensils before teleporting away. Then, after a few seconds, she came back without any of the luggage. She probably just left it somewhere in the tower.

.....I wish I had teleportation magic. I can't use magic at all, so I just get really jealous of that stuff.

"Now, let's go back, Miss Lufas."

"Let's."

Ushered on by Dina, I started moving.

But going back in silence was just sad. I decided to ask Dina about that memory manipulation technique she talked about as a conversation starter.

"By the way, about that memory manipulation talk from earlier: will it ever come undone once you apply it?"

"My memory manipulation magic won't stop working as long as nothing too unusual happens. However, once they're formed, memories are really resilient..... It's not unusual for memories to come back thanks to some small thing that happens."

"We see. Then, even if you were to erase those women's memories, they might still remember that they were kidnapped by orcs if their memory was jogged by something?" I muttered, after hearing Dina's explanation.

It seemed that even if it was called memory manipulation, it wasn't perfect. Most likely, it didn't truly erase memories but instead sealed them deep down. That was why, if something caused them to regain their memories, the person could quickly go back to how they were before.

"What a convenient, but hard to use, magic."

“Exactly.” Dina laughed, looking troubled.

Memory manipulation, huh?Sounds like it'd be good for use in caring for people after traumatic experiences or for removing evidence. There might be a time when I'll have to rely on that, eventually.

While continuing our conversation, we carried the unconscious women back to the village. Well, I say carried, but since I couldn't move my arms at the moment, I was just floating them along with my Esper powers.

“Ohh, you're back! And with the girls, too! So, they were all right!”

When we got back to the village, I spotted the chief running towards us happily. I placed the women down in front of him and took a step back.

As always, I left all the conversation to Dina.

“Yes. Apparently, the orcs haven't laid a hand on them yet.”

“Ohh, that's great to hear. There's nothing that makes me happier than hearing that our girls are safe.”

Dina told him about the condition of the girls before handing them over. During the few days while they were kidnapped, they just ended up being endlessly wooed by the orcs. But their faces were twisted in fear, and it didn't seem like any of the orcs managed to capture their hearts.

In the end, this game is all about faces, you orcs. You all've been given an insurmountable handicap from the moment you were born. No matter how gentlemanly you are or how gallantly you act, you'll never win against some hot guy that's just standing there.

The world is filled with unfairness like that.

“Well then, here is your 1500 el and our thanks.”

“Yes, this looks right.”

“Also.....uhm, what is that golem that's been standing there like it's protecting the village? It somehow looks incredibly powerful, even to these amateurish eyes...”

“That's just my master's kindness. Don't worry about it, and let it protect your

village.”

While listening to them talk, I started thinking.

With this, we’ve managed to secure funds and food for a while. I felt like the things I needed to think about myself have increased as well, but that was only natural on someone’s first day.

For now, let’s just rest for today and set out tomorrow.

Today was really long.

* * *

If the times change, so do games.

Ever since *Space Invaders* came out in 1978, games have endlessly evolved to fit in with the times and their needs.

Two years later, the first portable game was released in Game&Watch, and a scant three years after that, the NES appeared. Another seven years, and it was time for the SNES. The PlayStation came out four years after that, and from then on, every time gaming advanced a generation, there’d be a new set of consoles.

And what surprised players every time was the progression of graphics. From the 8-bit NES to the 16-bit SNES. And once we entered the age of PlayStation, CG started to throw its weight around. Every time we went into a new generation, the CG lost its awkward movements and looks, and started to look much more natural and real.

Once, a nationally famous game company released their first game for the PS2; the kids back then must have been really surprised, like, “Oh man, look how real the CG looks!”

By the way, kids nowadays’ll look at the same game and say, “Wow, this CG does not hold up.” That’s just how far CG has come and how discerning people’s eyes are now.

But still, the evolution didn’t stop.

Graphics and games got better every generation, becoming closer to the real thing. Fictional worlds that could be mistaken for real pictures on the screen,

and in that world, fictional people moved about, looking so real people might think that they used real models for it. It hasn't been realized yet, but the VRMMOs that are the subject of so many novels might actually come to life one day.

But that was just the stuff of dreams right now. Doing something like moving all your senses into a game was still far too dangerous to do. It might actually happen someday. But that someday was, in fact, 'some day,' which means not now.

—So why is it that I'm currently the character I made in a game world, being shaken around on top of a carriage? If I knew this would happen, I would have made a dude.

"We can see it now, Miss Lufas. It's the next city!"

"Yes, We see it, too. Don't make such a fuss." Dina, who was sitting in the next seat, shook me, making the already bad shaking of the carriage even worse.

The money I earned from killing orcs and the money Dina got from selling their meat somewhere came to 5500 el in total, so we were currently on a carriage traveling to the country of Svel.

Of course, Dina didn't sell any of the best meat that raises HP, but just the other parts. (Well, it does seem that she also sold the fillets that had been damaged and lost their effect.) I did wonder just where she sold all that meat, but she does have the ability to teleport. It wouldn't be surprising, no matter where she sold it.

Being able to move around so easily is enviable.

Moreover, it seemed like she was unable to teleport other people along with her. Apparently, in order to teleport someone else with a will, you had to either render them unconscious or have them agree to the teleportation. According to her, as long as there was some sort of sense of rejection or distrust in the target's heart towards the user, the magic wouldn't work.

Ahh, oh right.

As for my HP, I ate the other pieces of orc fillet, and now my HP is at 336100.

It's kind of an ugly number and it does bother me a little, but whatever. I can ignore it.

"Thanks fer da patronaaage!"

I paid the driver and got off the carriage. And we started walking towards the gates protecting the capital.

There were several soldiers standing guard before the gates, and they seemed to be guarding the gate strictly.

Oh yeah, this place was under attack from one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars right now. Sorry for causing so much trouble.

"Stop there, you two!"

Stopped by the guard, we waited for him.

Yeah, of course we'd get stopped. I mean, I'm wearing a hood and mantle. No matter how you look at it, I'm suspicious.

"Past this gate is the country of Svel. Show me your entry passes."

Entry.....passes? Oh no, this is the first time I'm hearing of that.

There wasn't anything like that back in the game..... —No wait, there was. Back then, the game was all about armies and countries, so in order to get into other countries, you had to go through your own and gain permission from the other country's king. Now that I thought of it, that probably was this entry pass thing.

And right now, unfortunately, I had no such thing.

But unlike me, who'd made no preparations, Dina responded calmly, taking out several papers from her person before handing them over.

"Here. These are our entry passes. Please check them."

"All right."

What the heck is this super-competent advisor? She's way too prepared!

She even got mine ready, too. She even winked at me, as if to say, "Don't worry about it."

“Hm, so you’re free merchants without any citizenship? Your names are Dina, and Sfal. Looks like your papers are real.”

“There’s been more people around forging papers recently, you know? Well, anyone who’d be tricked by those has pitch-black holes where their eyes should be. Hahahah!”

Nice job having pitch-black holes.

I don’t have any sort of ID of my own, so that’s without a doubt a forgery.

Actually, isn’t my fake name way too simple? Sfal.....that’s straight up just a simple anagram of my name.

“Hm, you may pass.”

“Thank you very much.”

Having gotten permission, Dina put on a full-faced smile. But as we tried to pass, once again, a voice stopped us.

“Ah, wait a second. Just in case, you need to take off that mantle and show us your face. Sorry, but we need to make sure that you’re not a monster or a devil under there.”

Ahh, yeah. Of course this’d happen.

But, to be honest, I figured this would happen, so there’s not actually much reason to panic.

It’s true that I was world-famous in a bad way, but people only remembered my black wings. This world didn’t even have pictures or anything, so nobody would remember my face if they didn’t have long life spans and weren’t alive back then.

To put it simply, if Oda Nobunaga were to put on modern clothes and get a modern hairstyle, nobody would point at him while he’s walking through the streets and go, “That’s Oda Nobunaga!”

And these guards didn’t have wings or fangs. Their ears weren’t even pointed; they were clearly human. That meant that I should’ve been able to at least show them my face.

“Ahh, sorry about that.Here, is this fine?” I removed my hood and smiled at them.

I’ll say this now; I’m no narcissist. But I was a guy before, so I’m aware of just how earth-shatteringly beautiful I am right now.

The ones who know what guys like best are other guys. Like, just what kinds of movements, expressions, and attitudes make a guy’s heart race. I just know how to move to shake up a guy’s heart. It happens a lot in games, where guys who pretend to be girls online are more popular than real girls. This is why.

There’s no reason not to use this weapon.

“Forgive us, guard. If We don’t hide our face there will be no end of trouble in the streets.”

“Y-yeah.....that’s true.”

“So? We want to go already, so may We pass now?”

Personally, I wouldn’t want to make a bad impression on a beautiful girl. Even if I was to never meet her again, if someone like me were to say, “I don’t want to get near that guard, he stinks,” I’d get pretty depressed.

Of course, there were differences between people, and, depending on the situation, he might even be a really brazen guy who’d say something like, “Come now, woman, don’t be cold like that.” But any healthy, upstanding man would have only one answer here.

“O-of course! Please, go ahead!”

Yep, as I expected.

I once again donned my hood, and this time, we stepped over the border into the country.

Right before us lay water, water, and more water.

The lake that looked to be an entire ocean unto itself filled my vision, only broken by the single bridge that stretched from the gate all the way into the capital.

This country didn’t exist back when I was playing the game.

It's a country without much history, since it's only been two hundred years since it was founded, and the founder used to be one of the seven people who put Lufas.....or in other words, me, up as the villain of the world and led the people to defeat me. He was the "Wise King," Megrez.

According to Dina, he was currently in hiding but still alive, and even now, he was living in these walls, it seemed.

I thought while we walked.

Megrez was there back when I was playing the game. We went hunting together, and we'd also partied like idiots. Even that battle wasn't because we stopped being friends; it was just a story thing to liven up the game that we all acted out..... Basically, it was just a play. I just happened to have the evil boss role, and he just happened to side with the protagonist.

Then we all had a great party and built up a story around it.Yeah, we did fight, but we were friends who shared joy playing the same game.

But which one is the Megrez who's living here now, in this world? Is he the same as I am? The player from another world? Or is he someone named Megrez who has nothing to do with *me* me? If that's the case, just what happened to the past where we hunted together and talked and all that?

"Sword King" Alioth.

"Beast King" Dubhe.

"Blacksmith King" Mizar.

"Adventure King" Phecda.

"Wise King" Megrez.

"Sky King" Merak.

And the "Vampire Princess" Benetnasch.

My friends whom I once had fun with. The seven high ranking players who represented their races and livened up the game along with me.

I need to meet them.

Four of them have already died, it seems, but the three in the latter half are

still alive.

I need to know. Are there others experiencing strange circumstances like I am?Or am I alone?

“.....So this is the country that Megrez built...”

I raised my head.

If I were to use one phrase to describe the city that jumped into my sight, it would be ‘City of Water,’ I guess.

This entrance gate seemed to have been the subject of someone’s desire for a magnum opus, and thanks to it being taller than everything else in the capital, it had a great vantage point over everything. Added to that, ever since I’ve been in this body my sight’s gotten a lot better, and right now, I could see clearly into all corners of this country.

There was a castle in the center and a lake surrounding it. There were four bridges extending in cardinal directions from the castle to the main city. The city itself was also split into north, south, east, and west areas, with a bridge for each one. Rather than a man-made river in a city, it was more like a huge city, and bridges were built on top of an expanse of water by force. A total of five pieces of land, including the center, stood on top of clear water, with eight bridges connecting them. What an odd capital.

.....Ah, it’s nine bridges if you count the one for the entrance.

The water glittered under the sunlight, and artificially planted trees and woods swayed in the wind.

Also, once I started to concentrate closely on what I was seeing, I noticed that everywhere I looked was lit with a strange light. Was that.....what’s referred to as raw magic power? Thick clouds of raw magic power suffusing the air were referred to as mana in the game.

The light that was probably mana imposed its presence everywhere it reached, and the effect was overwhelming.

As expected of the country of the Wise King. You’re showing off some pretty cool things there.

“The great magic country, Svel. This country, which was founded by one of the Seven Heroes, the elven Wise King Megrez, is special for its extremely dense mana. They’ve poured their efforts into teaching magic and other academics, and aspiring scholars and mages from all over the world gather here. But due to their dislike of the dense mana, the heaven-winged almost never visit.Miss Lufas, are you feeling all right?”

“There’s no problem. We don’t know about others, but to us, this is actually quite a new and fresh feeling. It’s nice,” I said to Dina as I looked around at the mana.

At the moment, I wasn’t feeling any discomfort. I did remember that the game lore said that the heaven-winged hated mana, the power of demons, but right now, I didn’t feel anything of the sort.

Or maybe the heaven-winged’s hatred of it was, unexpectedly, mostly emotional? If that’s the case, then I get why I’m fine, since I don’t really have any opinion on the stuff.

“Now then, as for our plans from now on.....where should we go first?”

“Of course, we will be going to meet Megrez. We have a lot to ask him.”

“Straight on, huh? But Megrez is most likely inside that castle. You couldn’t be planning to just barge in, could you?”

I shook my head in response to Dina’s question.

If I were to go boldly punching my way in like that when the monster I raised was raising hell, too, I’d just be adding to the chaos. No matter what I do, whether it’s sneaking in or waiting for him to leave the castle, it’d be better to avoid causing chaos as much as possible.

Then, the first step should probably be some light information gathering, shouldn’t it?

“No, We will be doing things peacefully. We don’t enjoy causing unnecessary fuss,” I told Dina before climbing down the stairs leading off the bridge, aiming to get to know the city first.

Dina said that this place is popular for its academics. Then, I should be able to

read more detailed books on history somewhere. I know far too little about the two hundred years that've passed. They're a blank for me. First, I need to fill that hole in my knowledge. For that, this country could be called convenient for how useful it is.

Let's see.....let's find a library first.

With that in mind, I talked to someone on the street.

"The library? Is this you guys' first time here? The library's in the east area."

I talked to a muscly human man who looked both frank and sociable. He was bald, too, with fat eyebrows and sharp-looking eyes. There was a scar on his cheek and a sword at his hip. And his armor was full of nicks and scratches, while his posture screamed 'Mercenary.'

The reason I deemed him 'frank and sociable,' even with all that, was because of his charming and lively smile. It was bright enough to completely cancel out the effect of his looks. That's how strong his expression was. He was just that kind of guy.

"The east area..... Which means....."

"This is the south area, so you need to cross the bridge on the right. The east area's where all the bigwig scholars and passionate students gather. You could say it's the center of this country. It's got all the libraries, schools, and museums and stuff..... Well, basically, if you want to find out or study anything, you should probably go to the east area. That's all you really need to remember."



Dina and I nodded in understanding.

Apparently, each of this country's separated areas had its own dedicated purpose. Now that I know that, I really want to just explore. After I get everything I need out of the library, it'll probably be fun to take a lap around this place once.

"Thank you, this was helpful. Then we'll be going this way."

"Hey hey, just wait a second, girls. Are you really going to go there on foot? The day'll be over by then."

Just as we were about to walk off again, the man stopped us. Then, he took a map out of his pocket and started talking.

"This country's pretty damn big. Each area's like 500km by itself. And if you put it all together with the castle area in the center and all the bridges, this entire city's over 2500km. Trying to go everywhere by foot'll kill all your time, you know."

"Then, how do you all get around?"

"We use the monorail. Follow me. I'll show you to the terminal."

A monorail, huh? This is getting really modern all of a sudden.

I mean, it's not like this world doesn't have its science, and it's even got magic. So I guess it's not surprising that there's one or two convenient vehicles around. I bet the monorail moves on magic or something.

"Oh, whoops, I forgot to introduce myself. I'm Gantz. I'm a mercenary who's working as a border guard for this country. I'm off today, though."

"I'm Dina, a free merchant. This person wearing a red mantle exuding suspiciousness at full force is my employer, Sfalú."

Without a word, I stepped on Dina's foot. Dina shouted in pain, but I ignored her.

What kind of person introduces another with "exuding suspiciousness at full force?" I mean, it's completely true, but you're the one that told me to dress like this in the first place!

“You’ve got quite the getup, haven’t you? Well, you’ve probably got your own problems, so I won’t pry.”

“.....Thank you.”

I’m glad that he won’t pry.

I said my thanks and followed Gantz as he started walking.

“Um, I’d like to ask you some questions about this place; is that OK?”

“Sure, ask away.” Gantz agreed right away to Dina’s request.

He was a really good guy to be this kind to us even though we had just met. My first impression of him really wasn’t wrong, it seemed.

“First, this country’s split into five areas. As for how they’re split, first, the southern area, where the entrance is, is the ‘Trade district.’ For those who just entered this country, it’s made to be the first place you enter. Anyway, this place has everything. There’s a lot of stores competing with each other, after all. But these last few years, Aries of the Twelve Heavenly Stars keeps attacking, so this place is a little less crowded than it should be.”

.....My head’s starting to hurt.

I’m getting real complicated feelings towards the actions of a subordinate I haven’t even seen yet.

For now, I’m gonna kick you once in the head when I meet you, Aries. Be ready. Of course, I won’t be holding back at all. Don’t worry. If memory serves, Aries should be at the max level for a tamed monster of mine, 800, so he shouldn’t die even if I kick him for real.

Going off topic, a Monster Tamer’s monster’s levels were made so that they could never exceed their master’s. For example, even if a monster was level 1000 in the wild, when tamed, if the Tamer’s level was 500, their level would be reduced below that. The formula was the Tamer’s total level/2 + [Class level x 3]. So for me, the max level would be 500 + 300, or 800.

Also, if, for example, the formula exceeded the Tamer’s level, (like if the Tamer’s total level was 100 and their class level was also 100, making the theoretical level 350), the Tamer’s total level was set as the limit instead, so it

was impossible for a tamed monster to be stronger than its Tamer.

In other words, with the formula, it was only possible to have monsters be the same level as the Tamer up to level 600, and that was assuming the Tamer's class level was maxed out. And at level 700 and over they completely started to be eclipsed by the Tamer, so at that level it was actually better to just party up with some players at the same level.

Not only that, but Tamers could only bring one monster with them at a time. Even if the Tamer had over 100 monsters tamed, they could only bring them out one at a time. Of course, that was because it'd break game balance if players were allowed to go around with tons of monsters stronger than them, and solo play would run rampant.

MMOs are based around team play. Naturally, by paying for it, players could solve this problem and start toting level 1000 monsters. Well, in the end it'd still just be a two-person party, so it wouldn't change the fact that it was still better to party up with other players.

"The eastern area is the 'Academics district.' I've told you about this already, so I'm just gonna skip this part. Next is the western area, the 'Industrial district.' Starting with the monorail I just told you about, all the magic engines that power vehicles and other tools are produced there. Of course, we're not as good as 'Blutgang,' said to be the country of craftsmen, though. That place is famous for having most of them there."

".....Magic engines, Blutgang..... We've never heard of either of these."

I listened to him talk while I whispered questions to Dina, who was beside me.

I knew of neither of those names. At the very least, they weren't around when I was playing the game.

Dina whispered back:

"Magic engines were invented by Megrez twenty years ago. They're a system that uses mana as fuel. It's much cheaper and more efficient than the traditional coal, so it's really hot right now. However, it's almost unusable by the heaven-winged, so at the moment, coal is still more prevalent."

So it's that, right? It's just oil.

I don't know just how much mana is around in the world, but I wonder if we'll run out of mana if we keep using it like this. Or is mana something that's basically infinite..... I'm clueless on this subject.

Well anyway, I can't use mana myself, so I guess I just don't care.

"Blutgang is a country founded by one of the Seven Heroes, the Blacksmith King Mizar. It's called the country of craftsmen, and a lot of the dwarves, amongst other races, take residence in that country. Most of the world's industrial goods are manufactured there and exported."

"We see."

Industry..... I know even less about jobs like that where you make things.

I muttered an appropriate reply and, once again, concentrated on what Gantz was saying.

"The northern area is the 'Residential district.' Almost all living quarters are concentrated there. It's the farthest away from the gates, so right now, it's the second safest area."

"Second safest? Would it not be the safest since it's the farthest away?"

"Well, of course that's because it's not guaranteed that monsters will behave themselves and come from the front door. Even though this place is a natural fortress surrounded by a lake on all sides, it's not guaranteed that monsters won't come charging in from behind us. Actually, monsters that can fly or swim have, in fact, gone around and invaded from another area."

Having heard that, I replied, "We see."

True, there's no need to be polite and come in through the front door only to be forced to deal with the border guards. In fact, it'd be more natural not to do so.

Gantz must have figured out my confusion. So he offered a follow up.

"Well, doing that takes an extraordinary amount of work. The lake surrounding this place is actually a water golem created by Sir Megrez. That's why if anyone tries to force themselves through the water, they'll just find themselves a victim of its jaws. Isn't it awesome? It's a golem that's a whole

lake big enough to surround this country, you know? It's totally a guardian deity that protects this whole country."

I honestly was impressed by that fact. I was also a level 100 Alchemist, but I'd never thought of a golem that would be an entire lake.

I see, so stuff like that's totally possible because this isn't a game anymore. In the game, there was no way anything that'd change the map itself would work. But this was reality. That meant that, as long as the materials were there, you could totally do what you wanted with your surrounding land.

.....Let's try something out if I ever get the chance.

But still, a water golem, huh? Megrez made something pretty cool here.

Heavily mana-infused water makes for pretty good material. If he made a golem out of that, it wouldn't be surprising if it's level 500.

.....Let's see, I guess I should check its stats, just in case. I thought and turned on my "Observing Eye."

【Guardian Deity Levia】

【Level】: 500

【Race】: Artificial Life Form

【HP】: 180000

【SP】: 0

【STR (Strength)】: 2750

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 800

【VIT (Vitality)】: 3400

【INT (Intelligence)】: 650

【AGI (Agility)】: 1028

【MND (Mind)】: 722

【LUK (Luck)】: 2300

【Gantz】

【Level】: 82

【Race】: Human

【Class Levels】:

▪ Warrior: 82

【HP】: 6860

【SP】: 476

【STR (Strength)】: 303

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 263

【VIT (Vitality)】: 368

【INT (Intelligence)】: 99

【AGI (Agility)】: 245

【MND (Mind)】: 72

【LUK (Luck)】: 208

Hm, so its level is 500, just like I expected.

For a world where a sword saint is level 120, it's more than powerful enough. More than anything, its HP pool is massive, probably because all the water is part of it.

I mean, what the hell? 180k at level 500? Is that a bug?

For golems that can't use stat-boosting items, it's an overwhelming number. Normally, a level 500 golem using mana water would have around 50k HP. Golems made out of water get a little extra HP, but only a little. To be able to drag that up to 180k, I can only compliment the Wise King on his ability. This thing's already almost a boss.

On the other hand, Gantz is, well, a normal early-game warrior.

No, wait, since the Sword Saint's level 120, is he actually really strong by the standards of this age? As always, I can't seem to get a good handle on the

general level of this world..... Well, he shouldn't be weak, at least. Probably.

While I had all that running around in my head, Gantz continued to talk.

"Lastly, there's the 'Nobles district' in the center. This is the area where only people of a certain status may live, like royalty or nobles, and it has basically no connection to us. If you try to sneak in like an idiot you'll get caught right away, so be careful."

So the center, where Megrez probably is, is a place for the privileged, huh? That means it'll be real difficult to get in legally.

Oh well, I can think about this later.

"All right, we're here. This is the terminal."

The place we were led to was very different from modern Japanese stations. That was only natural, though. With it looking like a metal coffin, I got the feeling that the station was built literally just to let people onto the monorail. There were no escalators or elevators, and though there was a fence to stop people from falling in, there was no yellow line. The inside wasn't especially nice, and there weren't any ads, and of course, there weren't any electronic screens to display when the next arrival would be. It was literally a bare metal coffin, only there for people to get on and off the monorail.

And the center of it all, the monorail was also a metal coffin. It was just a square box with windows and sofas. There were no patterns or paintings or any decoration.

I guess I would say that we would be riding in a metal coffin inside a metal coffin.

"Now then, I'm going to leave you here. All right, see you again if the fates will it!"

"Yes, thank you very much, Gantz."

"You were helpful. We give you our thanks."

As expected, Gantz wasn't coming with us all the way to the Academics district, so he said goodbye to us, and we did the same. It was more than enough for someone we didn't know to come this far with us.

I gave my thanks to the kind mercenary that didn't mind our appearances and got on the monorail.

Now then, first up is the Academics district. For now, I'll bone up on everything I don't know.

The monorail started moving, but it wasn't really something to get excited over. To the passengers, it didn't make much of a difference whether it was being powered by electricity or magic. It was only different enough for me to think that it was a little fast.

But when it came to the scenery outside the window, things were different. The lake was so huge it could be mistaken for an ocean. And the city was built on top of that, with lots of buildings all lined up. It greatly aroused my curiosity and made my heart dance.

I wasn't sure how old my body was, but with my eyesight I could pick out people going about their lives from inside the monorail, and I was staring out the window at them, feeling almost like a child.

And when we got off the monorail the atmosphere changed. The crowd was now full of intelligent-looking, slender people. It was actually worrying how skinny everyone was, and it made me want to tell all the people walking past that they needed more exercise.

But my eyes were especially drawn to the beautiful ones with long ears—elves. For elves, I seem to remember them being forest people that basically never left the woods, but times probably changed in two hundred years.

I could see elves walking down the street normally, talking and being friendly with humans. In fact, I could even see middle-aged humans and elven girls walking around like lovers when I looked closer. Humans and elves had far different lifespans. So I bet that, which just looks criminal, is probably actually fine, and the elf is actually older.

In other words, he gets to have an eternally beautiful lover. Go explode.

I found a library right away. Fitting for an academic district, it stood out. I was lucky that it was built so close to the station. The library itself was also taller than other buildings, shaped almost like a tower.

I went through the doors and entered the building. Inside, a woman who seemed like the librarian looked at me suspiciously but didn't say anything.

The library is open to the public. So I guess that means I'm fine as long as I don't cause any problems?

The inside of the library was a circular hall. There were desks lined up in the center with shelves surrounding them. Of course, the shelves didn't completely enclose the desks; there were aisles and passageways left so it didn't feel too constricting.

I immediately made for the history section and started looking at the titles lined up on the shelves.

The Genesis of Mizgarz Just How Did the Goddess Alovenus Create Our World?

History of Mizgarz Part 1: The Secret of the Birth of the Seven Races

The Wars of Mizgarz - From the Appearance of the Devilfolk until Now

.....I can ignore this section.

This doesn't have anything on what happened in the last two hundred years, and it probably doesn't change much from the lore that I know of.

What I want to know happens from when I was defeated by the Seven Heroes to now. Those two hundred years.

The Black-Winged Tyrant: Lufas Maphaahl's Life and Rule

Great Persons of History: Lufas Maphaahl

Was Lufas Maphaahl Really Evil? A Historical Inquiry

Lufas Maphaahl: The Only Ruler to Have Ever United the World

So this section is all books about me, huh? This might be perfect to find out how the world thinks of me.

I took the *Great Persons of History* and the *Historical Inquiry* books for the

moment and moved on. As always, I couldn't move my arms, but ESP's really convenient. If I knew things were gonna turn out like this, I would have gotten my Esper levels to 100, not just 50..... But in the game Espers were kinda meh at fighting... ESP being convenient for moving things around was only fluff in the game, too.

The Seven Heroes: The Heroes that Defeated the Black-Winged Tyrant

The Glory and Foolishness of the Seven Heroes

Great Persons of History: Alioth

Great Persons of History: Dubhe

Great Persons of History: Mizar

Great Persons of History: Phecda

The Peak of Humanity and Its Fall. Did Humanity Make a Mistake?!

Kill the Seven Heroes! Humanity's Biggest Mistake According to Historian William

This section was for the Seven Heroes, and it seemed what I wanted to know was here, too.

The fact that Megrez isn't among this Great Persons series is.....well, it's probably because he's still alive. He's not dead, so he can't be a great person of the past.

Still, what's surprising is that there're more books here that clearly criticize the Seven Heroes than I thought there'd be.

Is this okay? This country's founded by one of the Seven Heroes. Even though he's not the king right now, that doesn't change the fact that he's a legendary hero to this country. I wouldn't be surprised if the authors of these books were deemed guilty of lèse-majesté...

"Heheh, were you surprised? You're not actually that hated, Miss Lufas!"

".....It truly is strange. We should be the villain that forcefully conquered the

world...”

“Well, there are books like that as well, but as time passes the fear leaves, too. And right now, people are starting to think that allowing you to stay would have seen us fighting amongst ourselves less, and we wouldn’t have to fear the devilfolk, either. And most importantly, you weren’t really all that awful as a tyrant.”

Dina’s words still left me half in doubt.

I can somehow imagine how people feel towards me. I’m probably being treated like Napoleon or Oda Nobunaga. Looking at history, it’s clear that Oda Nobunaga did some pretty awful stuff and put fear in people. But modern Japan was full of people that thought he was ‘cool,’ and not only are there fans of Oda Nobunaga, he’s even being picked as the protagonist of mangas and novels.

Nobody that was actually there and experienced the fear of him would say that, probably, but in the end, they’re in the past. It’s a viewpoint only achievable because you can look at him like a character in a story. Most likely, the authors of these books are human, not elves or something similar.

“Well, for now, let’s just read it. We will probably be here for a while. What will you do, Dina?”

“Of course, I’ll accompany you. I have books I want to read, too.”

“Oh? What books?”

“This! *Mobile Warrior Gunboy Volume 1 Gunboy Dies on Earth*”

A novel? I almost reflexively fired a retort, but it wasn’t my fault. I mean, what’s up with that novel? It’s volume one, but the protagonist’s already dead in the title. The meaning of it’s so impenetrable I’m actually getting interested.

“By the way, I recommend the second volume, *Sorrow! Killed in Action*, and the third volume, *Chance Meetings of Death*.”

“He dies every time?!”

The urge to read it ran through me, but I stood fast.



I sat in an available space in the center and flipped through my selection of books.

For now, let's read up on what happened these past two hundred years and compare things.

With that decided, I looked at and picked out one of the books I had. Let's see.....

The goddess Alovenus. Presides over the elements of water and metal. She takes the form of a beautiful girl whose appearance suggests the sea with her blue eyes and hair, but there are also accounts that claim that she has golden hair like melted moonlight, so the truth is unknown. She's recorded as a kind goddess that loves the world she created, but there are also accounts that suggest she despises certain unsightly beings—.

.....Ah, I made a mistake. This isn't it. This isn't the one I want right now.

I set the book aside and opened the book I actually wanted to read.

* * *

—Lufas Maphaahl.

She was a heaven-winged that appeared suddenly two hundred years ago, and she unified the world in the blink of an eye.

While possessing taboo wings of pitch black, she was more beautiful than anyone. Even the heaven-winged, who place heavy emphasis on wing color for beauty, had to admit this, according to Merak of the Seven Heroes.

She was strong, just endlessly, relentlessly strong. People, monsters, and even devilfolk were just small fry to her. Even now, the reason she conquered the world is shrouded in mystery.

However, according to the people who knew her.....Lufas Maphaahl may have been an invader, but she wasn't a tyrant. She used force to unite the world but did not rule through tyranny.

Noblesse oblige. The higher class has an obligation to those lower than them.

Being a ruler comes with responsibilities. According to an elf that knew her at the time, this was her favorite saying.

Even if you invade using force, once they're under your rule and are your citizens, you have a duty to protect them. You must take responsibility to protect their way of life, protect their futures, and turn the futures of their children as firm as bedrock.

That was what she said.

You might say, "Like an invader such as Lufas can talk."

Most likely, this was exactly what people who rebelled against her said at the time. However, it was also true that she never burdened her citizens more than was necessary. In fact, more than once or twice she'd deposed tyrants just like that who were making their people suffer, and as a result, saved the country.

Lufas Maphaahl was no saint. However, was she really a villain, either?Now, two hundred years later, there are a lot of scholars who raise doubts about her rare breed of 'villainy.'

Why did she set out to conquer the world? That is unknown, even now.

The only ones who would know, her Twelve Heavenly Stars, are now fearful enemies of humanity, and there is no hope of conversation with them. However, given that she never once acted the tyrant, it might be that she didn't do so out of personal greed. The truth is unknown.

The truth remains that we as humanity rejected her, brought her down, and escaped from her rule.

However, the result of that wasn't the dawn of humanity but only the happiness of the devilfolk. It wasn't only humanity that thought of Lufas Maphaahl as a threat. Even the devilfolk truly feared her and were wary. They feared the great power of the Black-Winged Conqueror, the Twelve Stars that followed her, and the heroes that were gathered due to her power, and they waited.

Once their greatest threat was removed, the devilfolk moved immediately.

Humans, who lost Lufas, their ruler, and split into factions, created a chance

that the devilfolk didn't miss as they went on the attack. In response, the Seven Heroes and other warriors of the time rose up against them. However, they no longer had the unity of when they were opposing Lufas, and that fight ended in our loss.

Sixty percent of the world became the devilfolk's territory, and humanity's living space was compressed considerably. And now, humanity only counts 30% of the world as their territory.

The Seven Heroes are now three, and it wouldn't be surprising if those three are just barely keeping the world from crumbling around us. It's only a temporary quiet, a peace on thin ice. It would no longer be surprising if our world were destroyed at any moment.

And what's more, we haven't found a way to break out of this situation, either.

* *

—The world's totally losing?!

I finished reading, dumbfounded over just how badly the world was doing right now.

No, I knew that the devil king was still around and that humanity was desperate enough to try to call a hero. But still, I was making light of the situation somewhere in my heart. I only thought of it like, 'Well, if I leave them alone, the Hero'll appear at some point and sort everything out, probably.'

I mean, this country is really pretty, and at first glance, it's the picture of peace. Normally, no one would assume the world was doing this badly. This is the first I'm hearing of humanity only living in 30% of the world.

No, well, I did kind of suspect it. Like, it did come to mind that countries are pretty small and squeezed together and stuff. I mean, this country, Svel, is smaller than Hokkaido, too. Not only that, but this is a major country founded by one of the Seven Heroes, so I did faintly wonder just how small the world was.

But in the game, entire countries were just out there on the map as icons. And even though they were countries, they were basically just large cities,

which was a pretty common thing, so.....I just didn't pay it that much attention. I was just like, 'I guess this is how things are.'

Yep, I was naive. This world's in danger.

But now that I think about it, I guess this situation was inevitable. The devilfolk still have their devil king, as well as several of my Twelve Heavenly Stars. On the other hand, humanity lost me and the Twelve Heavenly Stars; and probably none of the high level fighters are around, either. All our levels in general are much lower, and four of the Seven Heroes are gone thanks to life spans.

.....Of course we'd be on the ropes. In fact, it's nothing but a miracle that we're still holding on.

Man, I'm gonna have to hurry up and retrieve the Stars that went to the devilfolk's side or things'll be bad, won't they? From what I heard, they turned traitor due to their anger at the heroes defeating me, so I should be able to convince them to come back if I talk to them..... Probably, definitely, most likely. I'm just barely able to be optimistic.

This'd just be a fun event in a game, but this world is super serious right now, and things're getting even worse.....

Even though I don't care at all that I was defeated, the winners are all regretful. They've been driven far enough into a corner to be writing history books like this even..... It's all just.....

.....Like, just.....

* *

There existed a single castle.

However, inside the castle it was crowded with monsters with no lord in sight. The throne was left empty, as if it was waiting for someone to return, and it was kept polished.

Beside that castle, a giant sheep sat quietly. Its name was Aries.

Aries was the monster that held the title of "Ram," one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars that once served the Black-Winged Conqueror.

—The sheep was dreaming. A nostalgic dream of the past.

Aries was weak. He was born weak and lived only to be hunted. He was prey and designated so by fate. He was born like that.

Aries was a rainbow sheep. A legendary monster said to be born only once every five hundred years who grew wool that shone with the colors of the rainbow. More precious than any endangered species, a rarity among rarities.

Every strand of wool was equivalent to gold, and it couldn't be beat as an alchemical agent. If woven into clothing it would turn into something heavenly that surpassed any armor and yet remained lighter than cotton, and it was the highest quality catalyst for magic and rituals. Just being able to bring down one head's worth of wool would allow a person and their entire family to live a life of luxury for seven generations.

Rainbow sheep were the definition of a living treasure.

However, in other words, they were just a monster that had wool that glowed in rainbow colors. —No, not even a monster. Just a walking gemstone. Prey that only waited to be hunted.

Rainbow sheep were without any weapons to protect themselves or even the legs to run away from enemies. They didn't even have the means to deceive their surroundings. In fact, with the rainbow glow of their wool, they actually drew attention from their surroundings. From people, devilfolk, and even their fellow monsters.

A rainbow sheep's surroundings were filled with enemies. All living things were their natural enemies.

That was Aries, a pitiful specimen of prey to be hunted.

If the goddess Alovenus, who created this world, also intentionally created rainbow sheep, could there be any crueller punishment? Just what meaning did this creature have?

All it could do was fear its enemies, hide, run, and eventually be reaped. Just what kind of meaning did such a life hold? Every day was a dance with death. Not even a moment existed where a rainbow sheep could truly rest.

The rainbow sheep feared its eventual demise and continued to weep.

—That was exactly why that meeting was a miracle to him.

Long hair like fire, fluttering in the breeze. A pair of eyes that burned crimson. Looks that were perfection personified and pitch-black wings that symbolized god's abandonment.

Aries remembered that meeting even now. There was no way he could forget. Even if he were to be destroyed and his soul reincarnated several times over, he would never forget.

His salvation, its origin, was all concentrated in that one moment.

“Oh? A rainbow sheep? I'm in luck to find one here.”

It was back when his great master was still immature and still referred to herself as “I” instead of “We.” However, she was already showing glimpses of her future as a ruler.

Aries, who was running away from everything as usual, met her.

—*I'll be eaten.*

The first thing Aries felt when he saw her was the overwhelming presence of a predator. He couldn't run, and he couldn't win. No matter what, he'd be killed and eaten. That was the future Aries saw.

Compared to her as the Great Conqueror, Lufas at that moment was, of course, immature, but even so, to Aries she was an unmistakable disaster. She was already too strong for any modern swordsman to even lay a scratch on her.

“What.....? You're trembling? You won't fight back or even run..... You, do you wish to be killed without doing anything?”

Lufas approached Aries, who neither ran nor put up any resistance.

Aries was frustrated.

Why am I so weak?

Why am I so miserable?

The weak had always been eaten by the strong. Unreasonably, the weak would end as simple food. Even now, Aries' legs had given out, and he wasn't

able to run. He was only able to wait for death.

This is too sad!It's just...way too sad.....

".....Are you...crying?"

Having been told so, Aries finally noticed the droplets staining his cheeks. He was crying. He pitied himself, scorned himself, and used his voice that wasn't even a voice to scream out the world's absurdity.

But still, the predators never cared.

However, she didn't kill Aries. Instead, she asked the weakling with its head hung low:

"What value do tears have? Is there some sort of self-satisfaction in lamenting how pitiful and unfortunate you are? How laughable—if you're going to lament your fleeting body, then try striking back at your opponent even once. Instead of hanging your head, try lifting your face and glaring murderously. Instead of weeping, use that mouth of yours to bite into your enemy's neck. Instead of grieving over what was taken, steal it back! At the very least, that's how I've always lived. And how I'll keep living."

What right do you have to say that?! Aries thought.

She gets to say that because she's strong.

She gets to say that because she has the strength to not be stolen from.

What right does she have to say that? She can't even understand my pain!

"Now, what will you do? Will you just sit there and be killed by me? Will you try to escape or put up some sort of resistance? If you say that you're a beast lower than some loser mongrel—then fine, I will kill you here and now."

Aries clenched his teeth.

He thought, *I don't want to be killed by someone like this.*

I don't want to die while being made fun of by this person! he thought.

Betting his entire existence on not wanting to die like this, he roared from his heart, louder than ever before.

Yeah, that's right! I don't want to die!

I don't want to die miserably like this!

Aries, who took back his previously forgotten thirst for life, made his first 'attack' ever. Baring his unreliable teeth, which couldn't even be called fangs, Aries bit into Lufas' arm! He was convinced. Surely, he would die right afterwards. He would be killed by this scary one with black wings, angry that she was wounded like this.

However, that prediction never came true. Lufas made no move to attack Aries, who was biting into her arm. Then, in a voice that was strange in how kind it was, she said:

".....That's right. Be like that. So, you can do it if you try."

Aries unintentionally loosened his jaw.

She was no longer— No, she didn't have any desire to fight in the first place. Aries just got scared on his own and sensed hostility out of his own imagination. When he realized that, Aries released the girl's arm from his jaws.

"That's the correct choice, sheep. If you're living, roar and bite. No matter if you choose to run or fight, struggle with all your might. Don't become fodder just waiting to be eaten."

That was when Aries finally realized. She was strong but also the same as him. The heaven-winged prized whiteness above all else. There was no way those black wings wouldn't stand out. There was no way she wouldn't be shouldering something unreasonable. Something like unwarranted prejudice or slander. She probably experienced mountains of that, or something similar.

However, she didn't feel ashamed; she didn't pity herself. She struggled with all her might; she fought, and she was still here. She boldly laughed as someone strong and was standing right there.

Ahh, I want to be like that, Aries thought.

Aries shed tears as he cried out, "I want to be like her!"

She—his great master—responded:

"Then come with me. I am still immature myself..... I don't yet have the power to crush the unfairness of our world between my teeth. So then..... Then

I'll show you. I will become strong. I will turn into an even bigger tyrant than anyone else and dye this world in my rule."

—Become strong, Aries. Along with me.

Aries grabbed the hand that was offered along with those words.

That was the story of the meeting between Aries of the Twelve Heavenly Stars and the Black-Winged Conqueror. It was a precious memory that would never fade, no matter how much time passed.

I won't forget. I'll never forget.

No matter what happens, I will not forget.

Not this memory.

Aries would absolutely never forget his only savior.

* *

While reading, I thought of one thing. And that was a sense of doubt over Aries, who was currently attempting to invade this country, and how unlike him that was.

Aries was a rainbow sheep.....a harmless monster that enjoyed peace and hated fighting. So why was he attempting an invasion?

No, I already know why. It's because I.....Lufas was defeated by the Seven Heroes.

But was he really someone who could lead and take revenge like this?

In the game, tamed monsters only followed around behind their Tamer and never spoke. That's why players had no choice but to imagine things based off of the monster's race and background or delude themselves into thinking one monster's personality varied compared to another's.

I wonder.....just what kind of personality does he have? I can't know what kind of person he is just by looking from the other side of the screen. I should be his master, but I don't know anything about him.

Just when was it that I first met Aries, anyway?

That was back when I still wasn't max level..... Right, it should've been around

when I'd maxed out my Warrior and Grappler levels and just started leveling Tamer. Around then, I was wondering what kind of monster I should tame for my first one, I think.

Monsters used by Tamers had a wider range of use than an Alchemist's golems and were more useful, too. Unlike golems, their levels could rise, and they could use stat-boosting items. They could heal, too, and they'd revive from 0 health if you healed them. They did have a level limit, but raise a strong monster and they'd be useful through the endgame.

At the time, I should have been thinking of taming something cool and strong first, like a dragon. The one I accidentally encountered was the exact opposite—a weak sheep.

Of course, I knew about them. Even in the game, only one ever existed at a time. It was a super-extra-rare monster that the devs probably put in as a bit of a joke. Ever since the game started, no one had ever actually seen one, and I'd seen fake info posted on message boards more than once.

I.....decided on a whim to tame it, a monster that I'd accidentally found.

For some reason, it didn't run away, and when it finally attacked, it was so weak that I was actually pretty worried at first. But still, it was my first monster. Of course I'd get attached.

At any rate, I leveled him like my life depended on it and ended up using a lot of stat-boosting items, too. Luckily, thanks to one of his skills, he produced one rainbow wool every day, which sold for a lot. Using that as funds, I gave him a bunch of stat-boost drinks. I bought all of the items that could teach tamed monsters skills that I could find and used them.

If he's a weak monster, then I'll just make him the strongest! I might have been a bit stubborn about that idea. As a result, it became as if Aries' weakness before had been just a lie, and even after I got to level 1000, he never stopped being useful.

Well, I did almost lose my motivation to keep that up when the boss-class monsters I'd tamed afterwards got stronger than Aries without any items whatsoever, though.

Now that I think about it, it could be said that Aries is the one who's known me the longest. I still hadn't teamed up with Megrez and the others back then, and I hadn't started my country either. Just what kind of thoughts did he.....Aries have over these two hundred years?

Was it rage? Or grief?

Either way, it seemed that he thought I was precious enough to try to avenge me.

That's great, but it's also exactly why I need to stop him. If Megrez and Aries were to fight, one of them would die. Purely from strength in battle, Megrez should win since he was a high level player comparable to me, but Aries should have some sort of plan. I can only think that the temporary feeling of peace here is because Aries is plotting something.

And right now, I'm the only one in a position to stop him.

".....That crying sheep, huh...?" I felt a strange muttering leave my mouth.

Crying sheep?I don't remember anything like that. That sentence, which I muttered incredibly naturally, was about something that I had no memory of, even if I did say it myself.

.....No, that's wrong.

I do know. I remember.

This body still remembers the past that's been etched in the back of my brain. The image of a small sheep that cried out that it wanted to become stronger is branded into me.

I see. I don't know him, but the bit of Lufas' memory that's still left in this body does.

Then there's no need to hesitate. Lufas' will aligns with mine. I'll kick that idiot, who's let his blood rush to his head, to the curb, and I can just extend my hand to him again afterward. I can tell him to come with me. To come with us. Just like back then, I can pick him up once more.

It's fine; I won't forget.

As if I would forget you.

As if We would forget you.

We shall never forget, even if our memory were to be sent to the ends of oblivion, even if our body were to be filled with a different personality.

So, please.....don't cry anymore, Aries.

Classifying the denizens of this world roughly, but appropriately, it's possible to come up with four different categories. Those categories are: Humanity, Monsters, Devilfolk, and everything else.

First, Humanity consists of seven main races: humans, the heaven-winged, dwarves, elves, halflings, vampires, and beastmen. The conditions for being 'human' are.....well, they're subjective.

If you require humans to be bipedal, then orcs and goblins fit, but they're treated as monsters since they don't understand speech. No, well, they are intelligent enough to speak, but somehow it's way too hard to communicate with them. It's probably a difference of values.

Next is monsters. This category is for special living things other than Humanity that have transformed and evolved due to mana.

This world's monsters aren't spawned by the devil king, and they don't just randomly spawn. It's said that all monsters used to live in this world as normal animals. So the changed versions of those are monsters.

To be honest, elves, dwarves, halflings, and beastmen seem to be former humans that have been transformed by mana, but we don't call them monsters. That part is pretty vague and half-assed.

The devilfolk are.....well, I'm not actually sure. Even in the game they had an astounding lack of backstory.

One of the most convincing theories is that they're a secret eighth race of humanity that's been changed by mana, I guess. They're probably not all that different from vampires. Also, they're different from monsters, even if they're both probably mutated from mana.

Of course, there're devilfolk who bring monsters around with them, but they're just using Tamer skills, so it's the same as us. However, even though it's

a game thing, they were able to do some cheater-ass shit like use more than one monster at once.....

Isn't it way too unfair when one of them is clearly leading a huge army of over one hundred monsters, but in the system, all the monsters are counted as one body? I mean, what the hell? The monster's name even says shit like "Goblin x 100." Hey, is it one or one hundred monsters? You tell me! If that's legal for you, then I'm gonna bring out all of my strongest monsters under the name "Twelve Heavenly Stars," dammit.

.....Ah, shit, no. There was a golem in the Twelve Heavenly Stars.

Lastly are those that fall under the category of everything else. For this, well, it's as it says on the tin. It's anything living that doesn't fall under any of the above three. Like animals and fish and bugs and stuff. It's kind of way too rough, but it wasn't that important in the game, so it just ended up that way.

And it's also true that there's not really much to explain about this. There are some differences in shape and stuff to their earth equivalents, but there's no point in talking about each one individually. In the first place, they're just background elements to liven up the place.

Now then, out of these categories, Aries is a monster.

Well, I managed to tame him using Monster Tamer skills, so of course, he's a monster, but to be honest, Monster Tamer skills are pretty haphazard, too. To put it bluntly, as long as it shows up as an enemy, even if it looks human..... For example, you can even treat vampires and dark elves as 'monsters' and tame them. The worst players would exclusively tame bandits and pirates and the like and call themselves "Human Tamers" instead of Monster Tamers.

So, with that in mind, Aries is very properly a monster. He lacks impact as one, but since he has a really easy indicator in his rainbow-colored wool, he's really easy to identify. He's easy to spot.

I also already know where he is. So the question is, should I go in boldly and bring him back?

I returned the book I just finished to its shelf and looked over at Dina. She was already into the eighth volume of the series and looked completely absorbed.

What the hell? You read way too fast!

“Huh? You’re already done?”

“Yeah. We’ve gotten all We want to. Let’s go.”

“Go?Where?”

“To the castle that Aries is in. Guide us, Dina.”

Dina got up, and the both of us left the library. Our destination was, of course, the nearby castle that Aries was staying in.

At first, I had wanted to prioritize Megrez, but at the moment, I couldn’t think of a way to get into the Nobles district. If I really wanted to get in there were ways to do it, but none of them were peaceful. So instead, it’d probably be more efficient to go stop Aries first before taking my time to think of other methods.

“Okay. Aries’ castle is right—”

Prodded on by me, Dina started to tell me where Aries was. But her words suddenly cut off.

The ground shook, and Dina collapsed.

“Hup.”

I caught Dina before immediately releasing her and returning my wings and arms inside my mantle. I was saved by the fact that it happened in an instant, so no one noticed, as well as the fact that everyone had bigger priorities now.

The ground shook intensely. The buildings, which weren’t as earthquake-proof as those in Japan, noticeably creaked and groaned, causing people to scream in terror.

An earthquake.....? It’s pretty strong.

It’s a level 4? Maybe 5 on the shindo seismic scale.

“Hm, vertical shaking?”

“You’re really calm, aren’t you, Miss Lufas?”

“We are used to earthquakes.”

Earthquakes of this level were daily routine for Japanese people. It didn't seem to be the same for people of this world, however, as they were clearly terrified. They reacted like foreigners who came to play in Japan and just experienced their first earthquake instead.

Seeing that, a sudden doubt crossed my mind.

"Dina, how often does this country get earthquakes?"

"It rarely happens, if ever."

".....Hm..."

Rarely if ever, huh? So, my doubts remain.

Of course, it's still possible that this was just a rare, natural earthquake. However, I had an inkling of what it could be if that wasn't the case.

Aries had a skill to cause earthquakes.

No, I should say I was *made* to remember the possibility.

Like I'd said before, a tamed monster's levels were adjusted so they could never exceed the player's for game balance. (However, it wasn't impossible to forcefully achieve this anyway with stat-boosting items.) So that level adjustment was one thing, but there was actually one more annoying thing: the management of skills.

Players could obtain skills infinitely, but tamed monsters had a limit to how many skills they could have. That was their level/50. That was the number of skills a Tamer's monsters were allowed. And the skills a monster could learn were widely categorized into two types: one a monster learned by leveling up, and one a monster learned through using an item that taught them a skill.

Originally, Aries was a monster that wasn't suited for combat. In other words, all his battle-oriented skills were given to him by me. That's why I knew better than anyone what Aries' skills were.

Aries' theme for his skills is.....that's right! "Obstruction" and "Percent Damage."

The solution I came up with to have Aries have a role even with his low stats was to give him many skills that obstructed the enemy, which didn't rely on

stats. And out of those, the one that Aries always used the most was “Earthquake.” It intentionally causes an earthquake in the area and lowers all affected character’s AGI stats, and it also has a certain chance to apply stun. It’s an ability that’s basically there for harassment.

I’m a heaven-winged, so I can fly, which means I’m not affected at all by the skill. Which means it’s got extremely good compatibility with me.

“It might just be chance..... However, if it’s not, then that means Aries is here.”

“You’re most likely right, Miss Lufas. I can feel the mana being disrupted over there.....in the Trade district.”

“Where Gantz is?”

So she can even sense mana being disturbed? I couldn’t stop the edges of my mouth from twisting upwards seeing my subordinate’s sheer versatility before I looked towards the Trade district.

That old man Gantz should be there. We’d only spent a scant ten or so minutes together, but he was a nice guy. I should probably hurry, then.

“Miss Lufas, let’s hurry and get on the monorail to the Trade district!”

“No, that’s too slow. Also, the monorail might be stopped right now.”

“Then...?”

“We will be taking a slightly more forceful option.”

Right now I can’t take off my mantle. However, like this, I can’t fly. So what should I do? It’s easy. I just need something else to be my wings instead.

“The materials..... Yes, that’ll do.”

I spotted a collapsed building at the edge of my vision. It must have been really weak to earthquakes, since something of that level already caused it to crumble into brittle pieces. I sent my will towards that building and activated my Alchemy.

I do somewhat feel like a thief, but it doesn’t seem so bad if I think of it like removing rubble from a construction site.

I completed a simple vehicle that both Dina and I could ride on. To be more specific, it was just a huge triangular base. By itself, it would be nowhere near a vehicle; that's how cheap it was.

"Get on. We shall fly."

"Um, it looks like we'll fall instead."

"Then grab on to our back."

I quickly got on the thing, and Dina followed on after me, clinging to my back. Once I'd confirmed that she was safe, I activated my ESP.

Use Psycho Throw on this base! The transformed piece of rubble, with us on top of it, was treated as a single weapon and flung through the air all at once! Now then, please, let us make it.....

* * *

The ground shook. As did the mana.

—*Something's coming! Something incredible.*

Someone terrible is coming this way! That was something Gantz understood not through reason but through the instinct he had cultivated over all his battles up until now.

"Orders! All mercenaries on standby are to arm themselves and gather at the front border ASAP! I repeat! All mercenaries, gather at the front border immediately!"

The messenger soldier ran around shouting orders, causing the Trade district to buzz with noise.

Due to necessity, the Trade district was positioned to be the most in danger of being attacked. Naturally, mercenaries and soldiers were constantly posted around the area, and they'd always stopped any attacks. However, the fact that they were calling those that were off duty as well meant the situation was serious.

The mercenaries hurried to gather together, and the gate guards were forming up before the border. Going along with the flow, Gantz equipped himself and ran out of the entrance to the Trade district.

“Boss Gantz! What’s goin’ on?!”

“As if I’d know!”

Gantz met up with another fellow mercenary on the way by the name of Johnny, and while they ran, Johnny asked Gantz what was going on, but Gantz didn’t know either. However, his instincts as a warrior were warning him.

It starts today.....a fight bigger than anything before. A fight to protect this country!

“But this atmosphere.....you get it, right? It makes my skin tingle.....! It’s here.....! The final battle that’s been on the way for so long!”

“So that means.....Aries is attacking?!”

‘On the way.’

Everyone was predicting this would happen eventually. The war with Aries had reached a stalemate, but that wouldn’t last forever. At some point, Aries was going to attack again with everything he had, for sure. Everyone understood that and feared it.

And that moment that was ‘on the way’ was here!

“Captain!”

“Ohh! You’re here, Gantz!”

By the time they’d reached the border, the border patrol had already finished getting into formation.

Gantz found the large man that served as his captain and ran over to meet him. Although they were in different positions as a soldier serving his nation and a mercenary hired for money, they were still both comrades protecting the same place. The two recognized and trusted each other.

“What’s the enemy’s size?!”

In response to Gantz’s question, the captain silently handed over a pair of binoculars. That probably meant that it’d be faster for Gantz to see for himself.

Looking through the binoculars, Gantz laid eyes on a nightmare that he would rather have never seen, covering everything in his vision.

The army approaching the border was an avalanche of monsters, monsters, and more monsters. The huge army that consisted of who knew how many bodies pushed ever closer with no sense of order or discipline.

“.....Wow, looks like the enemy’s being serious today.”

“Yeah. The question is, ‘Why now?’Just what happened to set this off? Or did he just suddenly feel like it?”

“As if I’d know. It probably just took this long to gather that many of them, right? More importantly, what do we do? Are you seriously telling me we’re going to have to keep that at bay by ourselves until the main army arrives from the castle?” Gantz said sarcastically, resting his favorite axe on his shoulder.

Right now, the guards at the gates numbered a total of five hundred men. And with two hundred mercenaries, that made for a total of seven hundred fighters. There was a limit to how lopsided a fight could get. There just weren’t enough of them.

There was still a chance of them being able to resist if the main army were here, but it was more likely that they’d all be killed before buying enough time for the army to arrive.

“It’s crazy but we don’t have any other choice. They’ve already gone out of their way to make a greeting and give us time to get ready. So we have to answer in kind.”

“So that earthquake just then really was a declaration of war. Those bastards, playing all cool.”

There was no need for them to warn us of their attack with an earthquake.

The best time to use an earthquake would be just before the attack, to crush any advance or counterattack we could try. But instead, Aries caused an earthquake long in advance and gave us time to ready ourselves. He went out of his way to send a message, saying, “I’m going to attack now.”

“I’ll invade and conquer, but I won’t start a war without announcing it first. I won’t attack by surprise.”

.....Wasn’t that one of the rules that the now departed Lufas Maphaahl set for

herself?

You cocky bastard, taking after your master in the weirdest ways. Gantz thought as he spat onto the ground.

“But thanks to that, we managed to make some preparations. All magicians, forward! Kill as many of them as you can before they come close!”

Following the captain’s orders, robed magicians stepped forward.

This was Svel, the country of magicians and scholars. The country ranked first in the world in the number of magicians within its borders. The magic barrage unleashed by them wouldn’t allow the monsters to pass easily.

“FIIIRRRREEEE!!!!”

A wave of magic was fired in time with the order.

That order became the signal for the great war for the country of Svel to begin.

“Let’s go!! We’re going to hold on until the army comes, no matter what!”

The captain’s orders reverberated throughout the air, and all the soldiers drew their swords. The mercenaries also drew their respective weapons, and they all kicked off the ground.

The number of enemies was large and unknown. The long-ranged sweeping fire of magic should have lessened their numbers, but the original number was so large that it was actually hard to tell if it made a difference.

“OOOOAAAHHHH!!!” Gantz howled and bisected an approaching monster with his gigantic battle axe.

A great warrior that anybody making their living as a mercenary should have heard of at least once. That was Gantz. Although he didn’t quite reach the level of the vaunted sword saint, his skills still ranked at the top of the world. He could bury any half-baked monster with a single strike and would cleave straight through shields and armor to kill the enemy within.

“Come at me, you monsters! I’ll slice you all in two!”

A second strike. Gantz sliced a howling wolf, a wolf-shaped monster, in two as

it jumped at him.

A third strike. Gantz cut down a living armor, an empty but moving suit of armor, as it tried to attack him from behind.

A fourth strike. Gantz struck down a bird monster that tried to descend on his head with the haft of his axe before slicing it apart while it was on the ground.

“OOAAAAGGGHHH!!!”

Slice! Cut! Slice!

Even after putting down every monster that came at him one after the other and being bathed in their blood, Gantz didn't rest. In the blink of an eye a small mountain of corpses piled up around him, and that pile only grew bigger.

“W-wow! So that's Gantz, the man hailed as the strongest mercenary.....”

“What unreasonable strength.....”

The other soldiers around him reacted in wonder and amazement. That was just how strong Gantz was and just how isolated he was from everyone else.

However, no matter how strong he was, Gantz was still human. There was a limit to how many monsters he could take on at once, and no matter how many he killed, with the number of monsters present, he wasn't anywhere near strong enough to push them all back. There was no doubt that Gantz fought furiously. However, that was almost meaningless in front of the sheer mass of monsters that was thrown at them.

“GWOAAARRGGHH!”

“—! Johnny!”

One of Gantz's friends screamed as he died.

Gantz looked over and saw that his friend Johnny's throat was ripped out by a leopard monster before his body was swallowed up by a wave of monsters in the next instant and disappeared.

War is merciless. Life is reaped equally, whether one knows a person or not. Even a friend who was just recently laughing with you can be changed into a corpse. Gantz had experienced that countless times; it was a fact that he knew

well. However, no matter how many times it happened, he never forgot the rage that followed.

“YOU BASTARDS! HOW DARE YOU!”

Gantz swept away all the monsters swarming Johnny’s body with his axe. However, he was already too late.

The little bit of Johnny that Gantz saw after driving off the monsters was no longer in the shape of a human. What was left was also quickly trampled on by other monsters, and it would surely continue to be trampled all the way until the end of the battle, at which point it would just be some sort of mass of color painting the battlefield.

“Gyaaahh!”

“Hiiiiiggh!?!”

Everywhere, soldiers and mercenaries alike were screaming their last, and the numbers of Svel’s defenders were dwindling. The enemy should have been losing fighters as well, but it was impossible to tell just how many. Even now, monsters were swarming around, and it was still impossible to tell just how many of them there were.

“Tch!”

A human-sized praying mantis, an Anveterin, sunk its sickle into Gantz’s shoulder. Although he immediately struck back and beheaded it, it hurt too much to take. Of course, it was so in the sense of pain, but also—and more importantly—in the sense of loss in fighting ability.

His arm would still move, but it was clearly weaker than before. In a battle that would continue for who knew how long, a wound like that was basically a death sentence.

“Dammit! Is the army not here yet?!” Gantz complained while swinging his axe, cutting down monsters that jumped at him.

How many more minutes? How many more minutes do we have to hold on? Five? Ten? Or even more than that? Impatience swirled in Gantz’s chest, and his movements started to lack their usual brilliance.

Along with the passage of time, Gantz's number of wounds grew, and his stamina continued to chip away.

This was the weakness of the country of magic. It had abundant mana, as well as abundant mages and sorcerers. However, magic had an opposite..... In other words, the country had almost no acolytes or priests who used the power of heaven, or heaven-arts. Especially the heaven-winged, who were most proficient in said arts, hated mana, and wouldn't come near. It could be said to be a fatal flaw.

Basically, Svel lacked the means to recover and heal during battle. It wasn't as if there were no practitioners. However, the number of users was clearly lacking. For this specific battle, the insufficiency was too big to ignore.

“Guargh!!”

Another hit. This time, Gantz took a wound in the leg. With that, almost all of his mobility was gone. Taking that into account along with his exhaustion, Gantz was already at less than half fighting power compared to how he was in his best condition.

Fear and resignation started to creep into Gantz's heart and take over.

Is this it.....? Am I going to die here.....? In his mind, Gantz pictured the faces of his dead wife and the precious daughter she left behind. Unlike him, who only knew how to swing around a weapon, she was smart, and clever, and his pride.

Right now, she's surely doing her best at her studies in the Academics district. Gantz thought about her and banished his resignation from his heart.

Not yet! I can't die yet!

In a flash, huge spears of water crashed into the monsters.

“—?! W-what the hell?!”

Countless blades of water rained from the heavens. And strangely, after hitting the monsters, they went back up into the sky.

Gantz—no, the entire battlefield followed the blades with their eyes.....and saw it.

The jaw itself, dancing through the sky, was over 100 meters across. Its body, made of water that was chock full of magic, was clear, and it was wriggling like it was covering the whole country of Svel. Its length was unclear. In the first place, it used to be a lake that surrounded the entire country..... Most likely, it should've been at least several kilometers.

That was the giant dragon created by the Wise King Megrez, one of the Seven Heroes who once defeated the Black-Winged Conqueror, using the lake as a medium.

The artificial guardian deity: Levia.

The holy beast that protected the country of Svel howled, and the sound was loud enough that the world itself seemed to shake. And in the next instant, hundreds of monsters disappeared into the dragon's jaws.

"The guardian deity Levia..... Finally, it's come.....!" The captain, covered in wounds, muttered in blank amazement as he watched the giant dragon.

Now, look! Look at this magnificent form! What impressive gallantry! And what a beautiful dragon!

This is the pride of Svel! The strongest iron wall of a guardian deity, Levia! It's invincible! As long as this great guardian is here, even the devil king or the Black-Winged Conqueror would break!

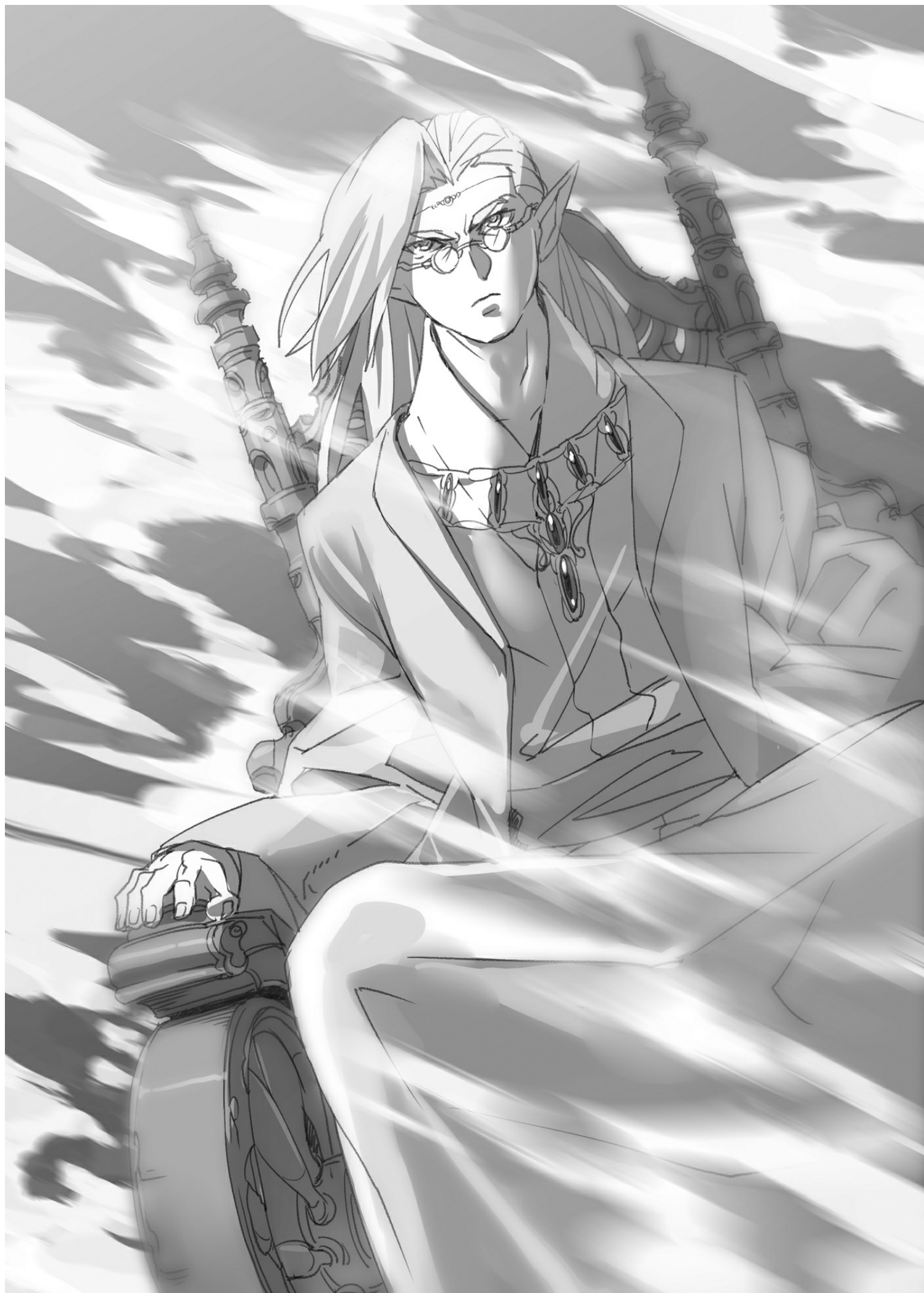
The dragon's presence was so overwhelming that the defenders believed that.

"Soldiers, you've held on well!"

The next voice they heard was the cornerstone of this country's defenses.

Everyone's gazes gathered on the speaker with looks of respect. His long, white hair fluttered in the wind. His eyes were sharp like blades and held the glint of great knowledge, and he had the signature doll-like proportional face of an elf. He wore glasses that were rumored to be fake and a white robe that covered his whole body. He was in a wheelchair since his legs stopped working after a battle with the devil king long ago, but even so, he was just as reliable as ever.

One of the Seven Heroes, the Wise King Megrez.



The soldiers' excitement bubbled over at the sight of this lone transcendent figure appearing as if to paint over this entire situation.

"Ohh! Megrez! Megrez has come!"

"Great Megrez, the Wise King! And the guardian deity Levia! Ohh, we're saved!"

"Hahahaha! Look! The monsters are like trash!"

The monsters were being chewed apart by Levia one after the other, and their numbers were dwindling in the blink of an eye. It was exactly as if a dragon were fighting some ants.

Unable to do anything in the face of Levia's gigantic body, the monsters could only be killed one-sidedly. No. Even if the monsters were able to do something, it still wouldn't have been much of a threat at this point. There was an insurmountable gap in levels between Levia and the monsters, so even if an attack were to land, it would effectively do nothing.

However, the people, elated over the appearance of the guardian deity, didn't notice.

Levia was the country's last line of defense, and the fact that it had to act signified just how far their backs were up against the wall.

No one knew.....of the fact that this was their last resort.

* * *

.....Wow, I've got nothing to do?

Dina and I somehow managed to make it to the border in time, but the fight was already reaching the climax. At the moment, I was standing on the platform I was making float with my ESP, looking down at the battle that was happening.

Levia was scary as hell..... That was my honest impression.

Even considering the fact that the monster army's quality was low, the water dragon's actions were overwhelming, to say the least. Just being huge like that was a weapon, and a strength, in itself. The enemy couldn't hope to shave away at a mass of water that large, and cutting it and piercing it didn't mean

anything, either.

On top of that, Megrez was constantly healing and casting support magic on Levia, so the gap was only getting bigger. Golems couldn't be repaired by anything other than the Alchemist's skill. On the other hand, that also meant that they could be repaired as long as the Alchemist was there. Levia was going on a rampage while having its 180k HP constantly replenished. The sight of that was a masterpiece unto itself.

"Oh my, looks like you won't have anything to do, Miss Lufas."

"Indeed, We can only commend them."

On the monsters' side, even the strongest was only around level 50. Put bluntly, the entire army was just a group of small-fry. Like that, there was no way for anyone to stand up to Levia, who was level 500. Aries must have prized quantity over quality, as all the monsters that made up his army were common in the game. In other words, they were all of races that propagated like rabbits but weren't individually all that strong.

Like this, Levia might actually win, even if Aries does show himself. There was a difference in their levels, but Aries' stats aren't that great in the first place, while on the other hand, Levia's got one foot in boss status. It's got no feet, though. But Levia also had the complete support of its creator, and more than anything, the water dragon had the leverage of their compatibility to each other.

.....Aries' element is fire, right? And it looks like Megrez's made preparations for him, too. This might actually be checkmate already.

Hm, I probably won't be able to, but I guess I should at least try to check Megrez's stats.

The skill "Observing Eye" would only display stats if I was double the target's level or more. Anything over that and all I'd get was the name and level. And it doesn't need to be said what happened if we were the same level or he was stronger.

That's why I know that I won't see anything even if I try to turn the skill on Megrez but..... Well, just in case.

【Megrez】

【Level】: 500

【Race】: Elf

【Class Levels】

▪ Mage: 100

▪ Sorcerer: 100

▪ Acolyte: 100

▪ Seeker: 100

▪ Alchemist: 100

【HP】: 29500

【SP】: 9400

【STR (Strength)】: 980

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 1250

【VIT (Vitality)】: 1028

【INT (Intelligence)】: 5720

【AGI (Agility)】: 723

【MND (Mind)】: 4290

【LUK (Luck)】: 1311

【BAD STATUS】 Lower Half Paralyzed

【BAD STATUS】 Mark of the Vanquished

.....Huh? It totally let me see everything.

Wait, isn't Megrez totally weak right now? And he's got some weird status conditions on him, too. Like, what the hell is the Mark of the Vanquished? I do get the whole lower half paralyzed thing, though.

“Dina.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“It looks like Megrez has some weird thing called ‘Mark of the Vanquished’ on him..... We don’t know of it. What is it?”

Whenever I’m in trouble, I just ask Dina. That’s the first and easiest method I’ve learned since coming to this world. I’m really thankful for having someone right by me that has all the knowledge that I’ve missed over the last two hundred years.

If Dina didn’t know anything, that would mean it wasn’t a problem of me missing the last two hundred years, and just knowing that was a relief.

“Ah, so that condition does exist. That means the rumors were true.”

“Rumors?”

“Yes. I should have already told you about how the Seven Heroes were defeated by the devil king, but to tell you the truth, there’s been rumors that the heroes were cursed by the devil king after their defeat.”

Cursed, huh? That must really be annoying.

“I think I remember hearing from somewhere that it’s the curse’s fault that they can only bring out half their original strength. That’s why, if the curse is real, Levia really is their last line of defense.”

“.....It looks like on top of having his levels halved, he’s lost several classes.”

“Woah! That’s pretty mean..... Doesn’t that mean he’ll never be able to make a golem of that level again?”

If Megrez’s weakening was all thanks to that ‘Mark of the Vanquished,’ then it was an incredibly fearsome curse. I shuddered in fear.

First, the level. Clearly, it’s been halved. On top of that, his stats have also probably been halved. There’s no way in hell Megrez’s INT would ever be lower than mine since he should be specialized in magic and other back line roles.

And to have half his classes disappear, too? That should be a joke, but it isn’t. He should have had the Esper and Archer classes, among others, but I don’t see

them anywhere.

That Mark of the Vanquished is way too scary.....

“Oh? Miss Lufas. Look there; it seems he’s appeared.”

“.....! Aries?”

The sense of pressure was so clear I could feel it on my skin. It was the feeling of his presence.

Having felt that, I looked towards him.

Even though he was a ways away, his wool stood out with its rainbow colors that changed depending on the angle you were looking from. Along with his huge body that easily cleared 100m in height, he was sporting a downright baleful expression along with a pair of cold, angry eyes.

The form of this huge sheep monster made the game’s cute chibi characters seem like a lie.

—Aries, one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars.

The monster that used to be my follower approached Svel while causing earthquakes.

* *

The huge sheep shook the earth as it walked.

The giant dragon raised a cry and tried to intimidate it.

Both of them were monsters beyond human ken, living proof of the Age of Heroes, and also monsters, that no human today could stand up against. The strongest golem that Megrez created before receiving his curse, Levia. And one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars that used to be under Lufas, Aries the Ram. Those two giants, who could sap someone’s will to fight just by being their opponent, faced off against each other while slowly approaching, creeping closer to each other’s range.

Gantz and the others could no longer do anything other than watch events unfold.

“GRRROOOAAHHHHH!!!”

“MEEEEEEeeeEEEEEEHH!!!”

They roared. Just that action caused violent winds to break out and froze people on the spot.

Probably the only ones who didn't wither in the face of Aries' roar would be someone of Megrez's level. And even for him, a drop of sweat could be seen, sparkling as it rolled down his cheek, giving away that he was just barely holding on.

Megrez was fully aware that he was far from his best condition. Levia was his masterpiece that he made back in his prime. It was actually stronger than Megrez himself right now. That meant that if Levia were to be destroyed, he'd never be able to replace it.

If that were to happen, even if they got through this battle, it would mean the death of the country anyway, having lost the cornerstone of their defense. Levia was a deterrent that Megrez really didn't want to move if he could help it. The golem acted as a restraint, giving others the impression that they shouldn't foolishly attack since they had a guardian deity. That was Levia's role.

In other words, losing Levia equaled the loss of the country.

Megrez had to somehow keep Levia alive and claim victory over that monster.

“.....Go!”

Victory to those who act first!

Megrez gave his orders to Levia, and it flew at Aries.

The two monsters' elements were water and fire. If they were to clash straight on, Levia would have the advantage.

Levia's fangs sunk into Aries, but Aries didn't seem affected. The wool covering Aries' body must have interfered, as almost no damage went through.

“Guarrgh!”

In return, Aries also bit into Levia.

But Levia's body was made of water. Physical attacks held almost no meaning. Levia's body, torn apart by Aries' bite, reconnected as if nothing had happened,

and the two of them took their distance and went back to glaring at each other.

“.....Mehh,” Aries cried, and his eyes, filled with rage and madness, glinted.

In a flash, Aries opened his mouth and shot out a line of powerful fire from the opening.

The target was.....Svel! Just now, Aries ignored his opponent, Levia, and tried to destroy Megrez directly.

The flames, which melted the ground itself along their path, were intercepted by Levia as it put itself in the way.

Was that attack really because Aries was ignoring Levia? Or was it intended to make Levia put itself in the way?Either way, if this went on, Levia would no longer be able to move.

However, Levia was still Svel’s guardian deity. Even though it doesn’t come near a real god like Alovenus, or even the kin that she spawned, the “true dragons,” Levia was still undoubtedly a witness to the Age of Legends.

There were seven elements in this world. Of those, Alovenus presided over two, and she spawned five dragons to preside over the other five. Levia was made as a guardian deity imitating those dragons.

In other words, Levia was nothing but an imitation of those gods, a replica. However, even as a replica, its power was real.

Levia morphed its ever-changing body, letting loose a wave of water spears.

Even though Aries managed to evade the sudden attack, Megrez made his move, aiming for that gap.

“Tidal Wave!!”

He unleashed a high tier water element spell, one that unleashed a tsunami. In that space that should have been empty, suddenly, it was as if the entire area was an ocean as a giant wave that threatened to engulf even Aries’ huge body appeared.

Magic was the act of changing the mana in the atmosphere into something else. All it did was fake events and phenomena that would disappear once the magic was over, but while it was happening, the event was definitely real

enough. That was why ridiculous things like ‘making a tsunami appear out of thin air’ were possible.

“Mehh!”

However, just when the wave seemed about to hit, Aries jumped.

The jump caved in the earth under Aries and caused a huge shake that even knocked Gantz to the ground as Aries flew up 100 meters into the air.

“Wha.....! It jumped with that huge body?!”

One of the mercenaries expressed his shock, but Megrez wasn’t moved. He knew.....he knew from the onset that Aries would easily get past a trick like that.

After all, he was one of the Twelve Stars that Lufas herself recognized. Something like common sense was no deterrent to them. They were a group that would easily stomp over even divine providence. That was why they were named the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars.

However, the next moment, Aries did something that even Megrez couldn’t anticipate.

Of all things, Aries blasted fire out of the ends of his hooves and accelerated through the air. His target, as before, was Svel! Levia couldn’t dodge since it needed to protect Svel and all the people living there, so it had no choice but to use its body to block Aries’ attack.

—They clashed.

Right away, Megrez put up a defense barrier, protecting himself and the city.

If Megrez was even a little late with that reaction, the two monsters would have crashed into them with all their weight, and everyone in the vicinity would probably have been squished under them. As if to prove that prediction, just the aftershocks of those two huge bodies colliding threatened to destroy the capital. However, a straight clash would see Levia with the advantage. Even though there was a gap in levels, it wasn’t insurmountable with the advantage in elements.

Or so Megrez thought, but his opinion was quickly proven too optimistic.

Something occurred within the rainbow wool that covered Aries' body. The wool stood as if it was being burned— No, it was, in fact, being burned. All the wool around his body burst into rainbow-colored flames, turning Aries into a ball of fire.

“Mesarthim.”

It was a skill that turned one's entire body into fire, allowing them to apply continuous damage to the enemy through simple contact. It was one of the skills once given to Aries by Lufas. A memento of his comrade who was betrayed long ago.

Seeing the skill bare its fangs, Megrez felt irritated.

“.....How annoying.”

Megrez immediately turned all his attention to maintaining the barrier and defending the city and his troops. He was forced to do so because if he didn't, just the waste heat from the skill would cause those around not of a high enough level to evaporate.

Of course, the capital would burn as well.

However, that also meant that Megrez could no longer take any other action. If he were to undo his defense, although he might be fine, the people behind him would all die. If he were to let up on the barrier even a little to attack, someone would burn and die.

Megrez had no other choice.

“Kssshhaaaahhh!!”

“MEEEeeeeehh!!!”

The two giant beasts once again clashed.

They shook the earth, caused wind to blow, and continued to crash into each other along with their tremendously oppressive presences. Just by moving, the two of them caused the ground to fissure. If one fell, it would cause nearby mountains to crumble, and just the shockwaves would break trees in half.

Like that, the two continued to crash into each other. However, Levia slowly started to look like it was coming out ahead.

Their elements were fire and water..... Looking at that relationship alone, Levia was completely on top. Of course, that was exactly why it could fight evenly even with a 300 level difference.

Levia's charge blew Aries back, causing him to fly back in an arc and crash into the ground. Once again, the ground fissured. And it shook.

Right away, Aries got up, but the damage definitely remained.

It was working. Aries was definitely being worn down.

"We-We can do it! We can do it, Sir Megrez!"

"We can win! We're going to win this fight!"

"All hail the Wise King! All hail the great guardian deity, Levia!"

Behind Megrez, the soldiers were all cheering. However, none of them noticed. They were the ones that were really in trouble.

Megrez frowned, desperately holding back all the insults and complaints he wanted to yell.

.....This is bad..... He's evaporating the very water that makes up Levia's body! Now I can't repair it.....!

Alchemists could use their skills to repair, or heal, their golems. However, that repair was impossible thanks to the water making up Levia's body itself being changed. There's no getting back what's gone! And on top of that, water made from magic couldn't be used in alchemy, either.

Water and fire born from mana weren't natural. They were just phenomena born from burning the mana in the air or transforming it in some other way, and once the spell was over, the mana returned to how it once was.

In other words, mana was an all-purpose energy that could become anything in creation. That was what magic engines used as fuel, and it only worked because it burned the mana as energy and discarded it. However, alchemy needed to use at least semipermanent materials, so magic that disappeared immediately had no use. Even if Megrez were to make a water golem out of water made from magic, it would just immediately disappear back into mana.

At the moment, the fight seemed even.

However, the one actually with their back to the ropes was the kingdom of Svel. Even if they managed to win this time, if the war were to persist, Levia would only continue to be weakened and become unable to weather the next fight.

But, even knowing that, there was no other choice but to keep relying on Levia!

.....*Forgive me..... Levia.....!* While apologizing in his heart to his masterpiece that had to be used roughly, Megrez once again ordered Levia to charge.

Will Aries fall first? Or will Levia disappear.....?

With no choice other than to bet on awful odds, at this moment, Megrez was having the most bitter experience out of everyone there.

* *

“What do you think of this fight, Miss Lufas?”

“.....If it’s just this fight, then it’s Levia’s win. However.....” I replied with my own prediction to Dina’s question.

At the moment, Levia had the advantage.

The relationship of their elements was really big. Unfortunately, I couldn’t see Aries’ HP or SP thanks to his level of 800, but I could tell that he was taking damage. I did give Aries a recovery skill just in case, but most likely, it wasn’t catching up.

That’s why, if this fight were to continue, Levia would win.

.....However.....

【Guardian Deity Levia】

【Level】: 500

【Race】: Artificial Life Form

【HP】: 103567/103567

“But in the end, Levia is the one who’ll lose.”

Levia's max HP itself was getting shaved away.

That Aries, what a thing to do. He was evaporating the water that made up Levia's body to weaken it so that he could have the advantage later. In other words, it wasn't a strategy to win in the moment, but one that looked forward to battles later on! He was allowing his opponent to win right now in order to certainly take victory later.

At a glance, Aries looks like he's in the depths of madness, but.....he's actually pretty calm, isn't he?

"I see.....in other words..."

"Yeah. Aries never intended to win this fight from the start. He forced Levia to move by making it seem like the final battle and planned to weaken it."

I thought it was strange. Even though power levels were supposed to have weakened in these past two hundred years, the monsters were still clearly too weak.

However, I understood after watching Aries fight. They were expendable bait, ready to be exterminated. They were just there to lure out Levia. It was all Aries' plan after having decided that it would be impossible to defeat Levia in just one fight.

"Aries should already be fighting while planning his escape. And neither Megrez nor Levia will chase too far."

"They're the guardians of this country, after all..... They're pretty smart, so I bet Megrez is thinking, 'This could be a trap, and more monsters will come while we're away.' So there's no way he'll give chase."

".....That Aries, he's gotten quite cunning over the years."

"You were the one who taught him to fight that way in the first place, Miss Lufas."

As Dina pointed out, I was probably the one who taught Aries all those tricks. In truth, I did make him fight real sneaky like that in the game in order to help make up for his low stats. But.....even I don't remember teaching him anything like how to jump in such a huge body. He probably just grew. I don't know if I

should be happy about it or not, though.

Anyway, it's finally reached the point where I can't just sit and watch any longer. I couldn't expose myself to so many people either, though, so I couldn't appear in front of Aries as 'Lufas' just yet. Or rather, if I did, in the worst case, I'd get attacked by Levia from behind. However, I can force Aries to retreat easily enough.

"We're going, Dina. Hang on tight."

"Huh? No way. Are you going to jump down from here?"

"What else is there to do?"

As soon as I said that, I jumped off. My wings were still stuffed inside my robe, so of course, I wasn't able to fly, but I wasn't planning to anyway. I allowed gravity to accelerate me and added ESP on top of that to turn myself into a cannonball.

My target was Aries, who was clashing with Levia! Specifically, his head!

"HYOWHAAAAAAAAHHHH~?!"

"We don't enjoy the idea of kicking a loyal subject, but.....apologies, Aries! Unfortunately, We don't wish for anything like revenge, and We have no recollection of asking you to do this, either! Cool your jets, you fool!"

Ignoring Dina, who was clinging onto me while screaming, I charged at Aries.

I didn't use any skills whatsoever. In the first place, since I had gotten to level 100 in both the Grappler and Champion classes, my barehanded attacks were now permanently damage-boosted. In other words, I had passives. That's why I didn't need any half-baked attack skills right now. My physical attacks that I've leveled up—in other words, my regular attacks—would work just fine.

.....No, just in case, I should activate the Warrior skill "Blunted-Sword Strike." It's a mercy skill that forces the next attack made after the skill is used to never reduce the opponent's HP to 0. The fun thing about this skill is that even though the skill is named "Blunted-Sword Strike," it still works with weapons that don't have a blade or even with one's bare hands.

It makes you think, wouldn't the name "Hold Back" or something be more

appropriate?

“—?!”

Aries noticed me, but it was already too late. Having accelerated more than enough, my kick connected, burying my foot in Aries' head, blowing him and his giant over-100-meter-tall body back.

After crushing several mountains, rolling over several times, and then crushing several more mountains in his way, Aries finally stopped, having been blasted back around a kilometer.

And I noticed Megrez and the others turn their shocked gazes towards Dina and I as we landed.

“Looks like you're having a hard time, Wise King. It must be some sort of fate that We visited at this time..... We shall lend you a hand.”

“Y-you're...Dina and Sfalut?!”

“Ohh, Gantz. It's great to see you alive.”

“Hawmowkneefree...”

“.....Dina's not looking okay back there, you know?”

For now, I breathed a sigh of relief, having been able to confirm Gantz's safety up close. I already knew since I was watching from afar, though. He had wounds on his shoulder and leg, but at that level they'd probably heal without a scratch.

Megrez was.....looking at us suspiciously.

Well, that's a matter of course, I guess. Someone as suspicious as me wearing a red mantle just suddenly fell out of the sky and kicked away one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars. He almost certainly knows I'm someone from two hundred years ago. But it's not too much of a problem right now. I already planned to show myself to Megrez anyway, so the important thing was just to not expose myself too much to anyone else.

“That power..... Just what are you.....?”

“We shall answer that question at a later date, Wise King. However, there are too many eyes upon us now..... We have our own circumstances as well.

Understand that We cannot reveal that just yet.”

“ —?! That way of speaking..... And that voice..... No, it can't be..... There's no way.....!”

Oh? Just what I'd expect out of Megrez; he figured it out just from that.

As for my way of speaking, well, I'd prefer it if you didn't pay so much attention to that. No matter how much I try to fix it, this pattern just comes out like I've been using it for years and years. I've given up on doing something about it already. If I concentrate, I can loosen up my speech a little but really only a little.

Leaving Megrez where he was, I lightly kicked off the ground, closing the distance with Aries. I used a Strider skill to instantly reduce my distance from my opponent to 0, “Blink.” The class comboed really well with Grapplers, so there were a lot of players who took both the Grappler and Strider classes. I was one of those.

“Ghh, urgh..... Just what are you.....!”

Ah, he spoke. What the hell, Aries? You can totally speak! You've only been going “Meehh~” for a while now, so I totally thought you couldn't speak.

But man, seeing you like this is as awesome as always. Even though you were smaller than me when we first met, you've grown a lot.

“Sorry, but We can't answer that question for you now. There are elves among those soldiers..... If We say something We shouldn't it'll spread among them immediately. So, I will simply give you a single ‘order’ for now.”

“—Turn back.”

I turned back on my Pressure, which I'd kept off this whole time. Of course, it wouldn't render Aries immobile, but it should go some way to revealing my identity to him. Even if he doesn't figure it out, it should at least get him to figure out that I'm not someone he can win against with how wounded he is right now.

“—! Th-this pressure.....! It can't be, you..... No, you're.....?!”

“Now is not the time to answer that. However, We will say this: We will surely

give you the answer you desire.”

“.....!”

The madness disappeared from Aries’ eyes.

It seems he did realize my identity. However, from what I can tell, he’s still half in doubt and half wanting to believe.

He turned his back to me and slowly started to leave while causing the ground to shake. Every once in a while he’d turn back to look at me, which was so like Aries in the past I couldn’t help but laugh.

.....Hm? Aries? The past? Did I just start thinking like Lufas instead of me.....? Well, whatever.

* *

It was a memory from days long past, already in the realm of nostalgia. From before Megrez was hailed as the Wise King. Back when he was still immature and reckless but an adventurer burning with dreams.

Back then, almost all elves still stayed cooped up in their forests, and it was rare for one to travel the outside world like him. He was a strange one to his race, an oddball, an eccentric. Megrez remembered a lot of those insults being thrown his way. However, he didn’t mind, and more than that, he was enjoying traveling the wide world on his own two feet. He met many people, parted with them, and then met more in the next town.

Just like that, Megrez traveled around the world.

It was around then when he met Lufas.

—Back then, every day was fun.

“This is what I think: Elves all coop themselves up in their forests too much. They should experience more of what this wide world has to offer. They need to turn their eyes outside.”

Megrez told his friends his dream as they all sat at the same table in a dingy bar. It definitely wasn’t a good bar, and the alcohol they offered was, likewise, of the same quality. However, everyone was there. Friends that were gone now. Even Lufas, who he cut ties with, was there. Back then, everyone was with

him, and they all laughed together.

“That’s why, someday, I want to make a country where elves can live proudly. Not in the back of some small forest, but in a more gorgeous urban place. I want to prove that elves can make it in a country like that.”

“Oohh! You sure dream big!”

“Hahaha! You talk pretty big, too, don’tcha? That’s right! Men have to have big dreams!”

After that, the Blacksmith King and the Sword King joined in on the laughter, which brought everyone else in, too.

Next, Lufas stood up and declared proudly with her booze in hand:

“That’s too naive, Megrez! If your dream is to found a country, then mine is to conquer the world! I’ll make a paradise with my own hands! One where nobody has to be afraid of devilfolk!”

The table boiled over with excitement in a flash. Her dream, which was too big to even be called a dream, caused everyone to do a spit take.

In response, Lufas’ face reddened, and her voice started to raise.

“Wh-What’s so funny?! I’ll tell you now, I’m serious! I’ll make you eat your laughter someday!”

“GYAAHAHAHAHA! Conquering the world is too much, even for you! If you really manage it, I’ll eat pasta through my nose!”

“All right, you said it, Alioth! It’s a deal! No going back; if I conquer the world, you’re definitely eating pasta through your nose! Hey, come on! Don’t you laugh, too, Megrez!”

It was so fun back then. Everyone talked about their dreams, which were half delusions, something they weren’t even sure they could achieve. They laughed together, and although sometimes they played pranks and fought, they’d always make up and laugh about it.

But—unfortunately, they had the power to make the boy’s dreams a reality. And once it became real, everything started to go wrong a little at a time.

Just where did it start?

I..... We... Just where did we step down the wrong path.....

Lufas, if it was you, would you know the answer.....?

* *

The fight with Aries ended, and I was immediately invited to the Nobles district by Megrez.

Each of the four bridges that led to the center were constantly guarded by over one hundred soldiers, and it didn't seem like they moved, even during that whole fuss.

I see. So while the border guards and the mercenaries with Gantz were buying time, they were planning on concentrating their might here to try a counterattack.

It's true that this Nobles district is the center of the country with its castle, as well as its heart. It's the place they can least afford to be destroyed. However, that also meant leaving Gantz and the others who fought so hard to die, so I can't really praise that behavior. Like this, there would have been no point to the deaths of all those people who sacrificed themselves believing help was coming.

.....Well, I may have my own opinions, but everybody has their own way of doing things. It's not my place to step in.

Still, I suppose I should have expected this out of the Nobles district. It's really pretty. This country itself was pretty well developed and designed. The Nobles district just completed the picture. There was not a single shabby looking house, and everything was basically a mansion. Even the people walking the streets were wearing fancy clothes like they were going to a ball, and they acted elegantly and fearlessly, as if they didn't even know about the battle at the border.

Well, on the point of clothing, I don't really have the grounds to comment. Under my robe is the usual dress, too.

.....Let's make something more normal to wear with alchemy eventually.

The castle was also very well designed. It's hard to explain, but..... Let's see, it's like if they took France's Chambord Castle and just made it a size bigger, I guess. The main coloring was centered around a mixture of blues, and the combination of white and blue was really beautiful.

As I passed through the castle gates, the soldiers there looked at me dubiously, but I ignored them and followed after Megrez.

"Ohh, Sir Megrez! I was worried!"

"I was so worried about what would happen to you when you went out by yourself..... Oh, I'm so glad you're all right!"

When we entered the castle proper, a group of well-fed men dressed in uselessly extravagant clothing came to meet Megrez. My instant impression upon seeing them was 'orcs wearing clothes,' but I admonished myself for how rude that was. Well, they say obesity is a sign of wealth, so I guess it's not totally bad. More importantly, it's wrong to judge people based on their appearances.

"However, I'm loath to say this, but you should be more aware of yourself, Sir Megrez. You and Levia are irreplaceable treasures to this country."

"That's right. You are several times more precious than anyone in that Trade district."

.....Ah, crap. I already want to take back what I just thought. These guys sound like they're worrying about Megrez, but I can't feel any actual emotion in it. All I can feel is a sense of relief that they themselves were saved. This is basically that kind of thing..... You can translate it to something like, 'You and Levia, who protect us, are way more important than other people.'

"Truly, it's great that you're safe."

"Indeed. This means the country is still safe. Hahahah!"

Those orcs in clothing were saying whatever they liked, but Megrez just ignored them and passed through. Dina and I followed, and eventually, we left through the opposite side of the castle and came to a separate mansion.

I see, so Megrez doesn't live in the castle, but in a separate place like this.

Certainly, this way it's much quieter since he won't be constantly in the middle of all the bustle in the castle.

.....Hm? But then, wouldn't it have been fine to go around the castle instead of through it?

"How was it? Awful, right? Those were this country's elite, meant to protect the people. But all they have in their heads is their own safety and the favor of those above them."

".....So you wanted us to see that."

"Yes. Since it's you, I wanted you to see the proof of my mistakes."

I want to tell him not to cut through the castle just to show me something like that, but I'll hold back on that.

As we entered the mansion, a butler-like person tried to take off my mantle, but I refused. The butler seemed disappointed by that, but still proceeded to hand Megrez a pair of crutches, after which he took the now-empty wheelchair somewhere else.

Then, I was shown to a noticeably fancier room which seemed to be for receiving guests.

"We've come this far; it should be good enough. There's no one here other than me and no prying eyes, either.Would you show me your face?"

"All right."

Urged on by Megrez, I undid the clasp on my outer cloak, took off the attached hood, and quite literally spread my wings.

As for the feeling of release and finally being free to move my wings, it's hard to describe. Actually, I've been feeling constrained and squeezed this entire time. I'll probably cramp up if I don't let my wings free every once in a while.

".....It really was you.....Lufas."

"Yeah. It's been a while, Megrez, old friend."

Now then, this means one of my objectives has been achieved. Now I just need to know if this guy's a player like me inside.....

Of course, I'd like it if he's the same. Someone also from Japan, who for some reason is possessing their avatar and is a comrade in the same position as me.

But.....yeah, it's different. He's different.

I understood already. I was made to understand. If he were the same inside, he wouldn't be looking at me like that. The feelings showing through Megrez's eyes.....were fear and regret. As if he was trying to apologize to me. They were pitiful eyes, like the sort a child would give to their parent after having done something bad.

If he was a player, he'd have no reason to fear me. There wasn't a single reason to regret what he did to me if he was. That fight was started with consent from all sides, and he would know that it wasn't anything near a betrayal. If he truly was afraid and regretful of that fight, then that meant he was a resident of this world.

I see..... So you're the same. You, too, are a resident of this world, Megrez.

".....So, even you look at us like that..."

So, I guess I'm still alone in this world, in the end. That's just a little.....no, really disappointing.

* *

".....So, even you look at us like that..."

That was the lonely, quiet utterance that escaped Lufas' mouth.

And Megrez reflexively looked away. His inner fears and regrets were seen through in an instant. And as it was pointed out to him once again, he lost his ability to speak.

"You are...not the Megrez that We know."

".....People change, Lufas. As time passes, they grow stronger or, possibly, weaker.I became weak.....not just in body but in heart as well."

Back then, it was different.

Two hundred years ago, it was different.

Lufas, enthusiastic and vigorous, flew all around the world with our friends

and took part in countless reckless adventures.

We chased dreams, ideals, and ambitions, living like we were running so fast we were almost falling forward.

But the present is different. I've grown a lot of shackles now. This heart no longer has the hopes and ideals it used to and now is filled only with resignation and regret.

"Say, Lufas, why is it you only revived now? Was it to come laugh at what we've become?"

"Who knows? If you ask why, We can only answer that it was coincidence. Some fools tried to summon a hero and called us here instead. That's all."

Megrez knew that he himself was afraid of being blamed by Lufas. However, he also, somewhere in his heart, wanted to be blamed.

Two hundred years ago, Megrez and the others rebelled against Lufas' rule and defeated her. They believed that was the correct thing to do.

However, once they'd actually accomplished that, humanity dispersed in a flash, lost all their unity, and were, as a consequence, trampled over by the devilfolk. And the country that Megrez made became led by the kind of individuals who made light of the lives of their people.

As it was, Megrez couldn't tell who was right anymore. He had even started to believe that it would have been better for Lufas to have stayed in power. Megrez thought that, in the end, all that he and the others managed to accomplish was to senselessly betray their friend, kill her, and drive the world to the point of despair.

Just what about that makes me a hero?Wise king, what a joke.

Like this.....like this, we're just war criminals, aren't we.....?

"I saw this country's library."

"....."

"There sure were a lot of books criticizing the Seven Heroes. It's unthinkable for a country where its hero is still alive and protecting it.Was that your doing?"

Megrez couldn't respond. However, sometimes silence speaks more than anything. The fact that Megrez couldn't respond—that just meant that Lufas' words were correct.

"It seems like you, too, have a lot to bear. Rather than praise, you want admonishment. More than respect, it seems you desire contempt."

".....That's..."

"You can't stand the envy and respect of everyone around you, no? You're about to be crushed under your own self-hate, but thanks to your position, you can't even complain about your regrets, and their reverence has become a blade sharper than anything else.....is that right?"

Once again, Megrez found himself unable to answer. Because Lufas hit the nail spot-on, he couldn't say anything.

It's funny.

While I, the victor, am filled with regret and fear, she, who lost, is just as bold as she was two hundred years ago.

Like this, it's hard to tell just who won that fight.

"While you may no longer be the adventurer Megrez that We knew, that difficult part of you never changes, it seems. You won; feel proud. You should be more confident knowing that you defeated such a strong enemy. But instead, We find you here, feeling embarrassed of your victory, fearful, and regretful.Say, Megrez. If the victor is embarrassed by their victory, just what should the loser do then?" Lufas said, before once again donning her cloak.

Her pitch-black wings were once again hidden, and her beauty disappeared under the hood.

Simply not being able to see her expression caused Megrez unease.

She might be exasperated. She might be disappointed.

She might even be sneering at me behind that hood because I'm in such a sorry state after winning.

To Megrez, that possibility brought more fear than anything.

“You have nothing to be embarrassed about. Some people who don’t know anything might claim after the fact that ‘That was a mistake’ or, ‘They should have done this,’ as if their thinking is correct, but in the end, nothing will grow from being concerned about that. Insults like that, made from a completely safe place where they’re guaranteed to be safe from a counterattack, have no worth. You should simply proceed along the path you think correct.At the very least, that was the kind of man the Megrez We knew was.”

What came out of Lufas’ mouth was unexpectedly motivating. Hearing that, Megrez thought:

She surely isn’t ashamed of that fight at all. She doesn’t regret a single thing.

As a result, it sparked a rebellion, but she’s surely proud of even that. She’s no different from the woman she was back then, whom I admired and wanted to follow with all my heart.

“.....Is that your attempt to comfort me? If it is, I’m grateful.”

“There is no need for your thanks. We simply gave you a small warning because you were looking far too pathetic,” Lufas said before leaving the room.

I suppose that means she has no more business here.

But that’s a matter of course. Right now, she has somewhere she needs to be above all else and something she needs to do.

Then right now, what I can do is... Well, it’s certainly not regretting the past. Megrez resolved himself.

“Lufas.”

“Hm?”

“Let me see you to the exit. As I am now, I can still do at least that much.”

While depending on his crutches, Megrez walked up beside Lufas. Like that, Megrez felt like they’d be able to go back to how things were, at least while they were walking. Megrez reminisced back to when there were no shackles, but instead, days passed where they could simply be adventurers.

“.....There is someone pulling the strings behind Aries.”

“What?”

“Aries is certainly the one invading this country, but there’s someone stoking the fires of his desire for revenge and using him. I don’t believe I need to be telling you this, but.....be careful, Lufas.”

“‘Who do you think you’re speaking to?’ is what We would like to say, but it’s a warning from an old friend. We’ll take it gladly.”

It’s as if we’ve gone back in time, Megrez thought.

But that was just a hallucination..... There was no going back, and even if there was, he shouldn’t. Their paths had long since separated.

Lufas waved goodbye lightly and exited the mansion without looking back. Megrez could do nothing but stand there, watching her back disappear into the distance.

The two of them should have been friends in the past. However, right now, to Lufas, Megrez was no longer the friend that she knew. And to Megrez, Lufas was someone he once betrayed. The distance between them was vast; a huge gap that could never be filled ran between the two.

* *

After parting from Megrez and leaving the castle, we headed straight for where Aries was, the Gheil Volcano. We were already going to go there anyway if it weren’t for that whole attack, so we were actually following our original plan.

If left alone, Aries would definitely defeat Levia and destroy Svel, and that’s not a good thing. I wasn’t there for long, but I quite like that country. It’s really got a fantasy feel. So I’m going to have to stop that dumbass sheep myself.

The distance looked to be about 20km from Svel. It was farther than I expected, but for Aries’ huge body, it probably wasn’t actually that far.

First off, let’s say a regular sheep is a meter tall. Of course, this is with it standing on all fours, not vertical for some reason. Aries on all fours was over 100 meters tall, so he was 100 times bigger than a normal sheep. So, 20km to Aries was basically as close as 200m.

Of course, there were differences in speed between a human and a sheep, but in any case, to Aries the distance was only a matter of a few minutes or even tens of seconds, so even 20km away, Svel was by no means safe. If the country were to get complacent because of the distance, it'd be entirely possible for Aries to trample over the entire city in thirty seconds.

Just being large has accompanying power and speed.

Normally, you'd think that if someone got bigger they'd get slower, right? For example, if some bug were to become human-sized, it wouldn't suddenly become really strong or fast, it'd just get crushed under its own weight. A bug's exoskeleton is unable to support a large amount of weight, and it only works because the bug is so weak. It's because it's small that a bug can fly several tens of times its own size in distance and can carry things much heavier than itself. This isn't just limited to bugs. Every living thing has its own perfect size and physical ability.

But this is a fantasy world. In this world, things can make no sense, and the unnatural can become natural. Just what kind of power is behind that, I have no idea, and given my education, I wouldn't understand anyway. It could just be that living things are made of different stuff, right down to the bones.

However, there is one thing I can say.

"In this world, common sense doesn't apply."

In reality, Aries is able to move normally with that size, so there's no choice other than to accept that statement. The contradiction of being able to move far better than a normal sheep on top of that over-100-meter-tall body. It works in this world.

Also, this distance is no huge deal for me, either.

"Well then, We'll be going. You can drop in through teleportation later."

"Understood. Good luck."

I left Dina in town. Even if I were to leave her behind, she could just use teleportation to meet up again later, and thinking clearly, there wasn't any need to bring her around with me before, either.

She's a really convenient person to have around, was my honest impression.

Well, that's just fine.

The problem is the devilfolk behind him, or whatever, but.....I can't really tell anything until I meet that person. If they're the boss of the devilfolk, they're definitely level 1000, but if that's the case, I have no idea why Svel is still standing.

Could they just be torturing them? Or do they really only have that much power?

I can't shake this creepy feeling.

* *

The Gheil Volcano.

This mountain, which peaked at a towering 1000 meters above sea level, stood 20km away from Svel. It was an active volcano, but was currently undergoing a long rest period, and hadn't erupted in several hundred years. At its foot, a single castle fortress stood, playing host to monsters.

However, Aries was not inside. In the first place, Aries couldn't fit inside with his huge body. This castle was just there for appearances, and the throne was left empty.

It was definitely not impossible to get inside for Aries. Aries did have a skill to assume a temporary human form given to him by a Monster Tamer skill. Most likely, it was possible for him to assume that form and sit on the throne in the castle.

However, he had no intention of doing so. If he were to take human form while being consumed by revenge like he was now, it would certainly look awful. Aries wouldn't be able to take the form given to him by his master being sullied and twisted like that.....so he always moved around as a monster.

These two hundred years, Aries had never once used his skill to take human form.

"Aries."

Someone called out to Aries, who was lying down next to the castle. It was

the voice of a boy who was still young..... Aries didn't hide his disdain and turned a sharp gaze on him.

From Aries' huge perspective, he was so small Aries could just fail to notice him, like an ant..... Mars, whose height didn't even reach 150 centimeters, smiled happily as Aries properly centered the boy before snorting in derision.

"What do you want?"

"Oh? Can't I talk to you without any particular business?"

The boy looked like a human in shape, but his skin was clearly a different color. His entire body was covered in blue skin, and the whites of his eyes were actually black. Fangs peeked out of the corners of his mouth, and his presence was definitely inhuman.

And in truth, the boy wasn't human at all. He was part of the race of evil that was currently tormenting humanity, the devilfolk. His appearance perfectly aligned with that race's traits.

"First, shall I compliment you on a job well done? That just then weakened Levia considerably..... The next time you fight, you'll probably win."

".....Of course. That was my plan."

"Then, why are you simply sleeping and doing nothing right now? You're so close to bringing down Svel, you know? Just what are you waiting for?"

The young devil boy talked kindly, like a close friend trying to get Aries to confide in him. But the dangerous glint in his eyes held not even a single hint of friendliness nor kindness.

"No, it didn't just start now, either. These last couple years, you could have crushed Svel any time you pleased. But you haven't. Why?"

"....."

"You couldn't be second-guessing yourself. They're the bastards that betrayed your precious master. Did you forget?"

".....No, I could never forget."

Aries was actually hesitating. That was an indisputable fact.

He had no qualms about bringing down the Seven Heroes themselves. If they were just some common warriors, he would have killed them long ago.

However, if they died, their countries would fall, and the devilfolk would be pleased. His master definitely wouldn't want that. Because she, more than anyone, had desired and aimed to be free of the fear of the devilfolk. There was no way she'd want to destroy an entire country only over revenge.

Aries already knew from the beginning that his revenge went against his master's wishes.

But, even so..... Aries couldn't forget. Not ever. The warmth of that hand that was offered to him that day. Nor could he forget the anger over the fact that that same hand was stolen from him.

"I know..... I will definitely kill Megrez. Right now, I'm just waiting for my wounds to heal."

"I see. I'm relieved to hear that. Then, you can go already, right?"

".....Yes. I can go at any time."

Aries had his doubts. But the fire of his anger towards Megrez.....no, all of the Seven Heroes, would never fade. No matter if it caused the destruction of the world or if it went against his master's wishes.....even so, Aries couldn't suppress the anger with reason. Just how could he live without clearing away the anger and grief at having his master stolen away?

Aries let the madness consume him and stood his huge frame up.

Levia would probably show itself again, but this time, he had confidence that he'd win. As for Megrez himself, although in his prime it was another matter entirely, as he was now, he was entirely killable.

"Great. Then let's go attack now. My monster preparations are perfect. Of course, it's not just a gathering of weaklings like last time. It's an elite army full of monsters, like over level 80 wyverns. This force'll even overwhelm the great Sword Saint in only tens of minutes."

".....I only see a gathering of weaklings, though."

"Oh? How harsh. I guess it's a matter of course when compared to the Twelve

Heavenly Stars. Anything'd look weak."

From Aries' perspective, the monsters that the boy gathered were simply weaklings that would make no difference whether they were there or not.

Humanity wasn't the only one that degraded over the last two hundred years. Although, as a result of that fight the devilfolk won, they didn't come out unscathed, given that it was a fight hard enough to wipe out almost all of the heroes from that era.

Just like how humanity lost all of their great warriors of the time, the devilfolk also paid a great price, and nearly all the devilfolk that could be called strong, other than the devil king himself, were also wiped out by the heroes. And the most powerful monsters were used by both sides, humanity and the devilfolk, so their numbers were reduced as well, with some species even being completely wiped out.

The devilfolk won, but that fight was almost completely even. It was a fight where either side could have won, and the winner was simply the side whose casualties were the least severe..... That was exactly why it was unforgivable.

If Aries' master had been there, humanity would have won. It would have been a massacre. Humanity would have cleaned this world of the devilfolk, and Lufas would have built a world free of their fear.

And who was it that wasted all that potential? Just who were the fools that caused this current situation? Those people, who were nothing more than war criminals, were hailed as heroes and, even now, lived carefree, and Aries just couldn't stand that.

That's why he would kill them. He had no doubts about that decision.

They probably had their own version of justice, but it didn't matter a wink to Aries.

His only real worry was..... Aries just couldn't stop thinking the person in the red mantle that appeared back then was his master. And that filled Aries with a strange sense of hope as well as fear.

"Heheheh..... Finally, Svel will fall. I hope you're pleased, great devil king. Now, once again, one of the foolish heroes who dared to stand against you will

disappear.”

This devilfolk boy, who was one of the devil king’s loyal seven commanders given the title of the “Seven Luminaries” by the devil king himself, was named Mars, and he was currently chuckling to himself with a fascinating smile on his face.

After this battle, he would have taken down one of the Seven Heroes and be able to present his great king with the human’s head. Once that happened, he’d surpass the other six and be recognized as the king’s aide.

It’d been two hundred years since the Age of Heroes..... Almost all of the elites from back then had gone, and the upper ranks of the devilfolk had been almost completely replaced.

The Seven Luminaries were also something that only formed due to that trend as a new rank of commander, but all of them lacked actual achievements. However, if Mars were to win this fight, he’d have such an achievement under his belt and should be able to win the king’s trust.

Back when Mars tried to attack Svel himself, he got burned.

Putting Megrez aside, that guardian deity Levia was far too troublesome. It had a nearly bottomless amount of health due to it being made out of an entire huge lake, and it wasn’t affected by physical attacks. On top of that, Megrez could heal it indefinitely.

Mars had a lot of trouble finding a way to defeat it, but luck was on his side.

When Mars found Aries sitting here at the foot of the Gheil Volcano right by Svel, acting as if the soul just flew right out of him, he even thanked a goddess he didn’t believe in for that wonderful chance meeting.

Mars took months and years to convince Aries, who was full of doubt and hesitation, drive him to madness, and blow up his desire for revenge. It was pretty hard to get him to attack Svel.

However, today, all that effort would pay off.

I’m about to use one of the Twelve Stars, who once sided with humanity, to drive them further into despair..... What a pleasant feeling!

Now show me, rainbow sheep. Give me the despair and fear of humans.

“The only thing I’m worried about is that one in the red cloak..... Even though you’d let your guard down, that person still blew you away, Aries. They’re no weakling.....”

Mars was thinking, *Of course, if Aries got serious he’d never lose to such a person.*

However, if that person, Levia, and Megrez were to fight all at once, even Aries would have a hard time. There was still the monster army, but it would be a hard sell to convince anyone that would close the gap.

“.....I don’t really like it, but in the worst case, I might have to join the battle myself.”

Mars crossed his arms and looked over at the crowds of monsters formed up past the castle.

The situation favors us.

As long as I don’t let my guard down, we won’t lose.

Mars could just imagine Megrez’s face twisted in despair. He could even almost see the jealous faces of the other Seven Luminaries.

The flow is coming our way. This is definitely the pattern where we win.

With that thought, Mars smiled—.

—And right after, a giant group of monsters was blown away all at once, and the smile froze on Mars’ face.

“.....?! Wh-What the hell?!”

Leaning out of a window of the castle, Mars stared out into the distance.

What the hell? What just happened? No way, did Megrez come out himself to attack?

Using the excellent vision given to all devilfolk, Mars focused on the monsters being blown away before him, and he saw it. A person wearing a deep crimson cloak, walking this way.

“That’s.....!”

It was the uncertain element that kicked away Aries the other day.

Seeing the person stand against them once again, Mars clenched his teeth, but he immediately turned around and thought that this was his chance at victory.

Yes, this is a chance. If we can eliminate that person now, that stops any chance of them teaming up with Megrez and Levia later.

In the worst case, it can just be me, Aries, and a couple high level monsters who take down Svel.

So what's important is to go kill that red mantle right now, no matter how many I have to sacrifice!

“Don’t falter! It’s just one person!”

The monsters howled in response to Mars’ encouragement, and they all charged at once at the single figure.

No matter how strong the person was, they were alone. There was no way to push back this many with quality alone, and it was impossible to control the battlefield with just a single unit.

However, Mars’ expectations were easily overturned.

In an instant, several tens—no, several hundreds—of blades manifested around the figure, launching themselves all at once and blasting the monsters apart one after the other.

Ten, twenty, thirty.....

Monster corpses continued to pile up, but not even one got close.

A hundred, a hundred-fifty, two hundred.....

Even now, nothing managed to close the distance. There was no sign of the enemy stopping their attack.

Three hundred, four hundred, five hundred.....

Mars could see the army given to him by the devil king himself disappearing. They were being trampled.

“.....What is that.....?”

Way too strong.

That mysterious person is way too strong! It's as if one of the great warriors from two hundred years ago is right here! Like one of them came back from the dead.

Is it another one of the Seven Heroes? No.....the Sky King hates mana and wouldn't be anywhere near here, and the Vampire Princess isn't the sort to suddenly help elves out.

It's not one of the Seven Heroes.....but what fearsome strength.

Mars decided that, as it was, the monsters would only continue to die with nothing to show for it, so he made the army fall back.

In exchange, he went out to face the red mantle himself.

“.....A devilfolk, huh?”

“That's right. And just what are you? I didn't think there was anyone left in this world that strong,” Mars said, readying a short sword in each hand.

A sword of fire in his right.

And a sword of ice in his left.

Seal their movements with cold, and burn them to death with fire. And the sudden change in temperatures will render anything brittle, allowing them to be shattered like glass.

“But, it's all over now that I'm here. Too bad, but your life is forfeit now that you've made enemies of the devilfolk. You should curse your own foolishness that you came all the way out here with only your half-assed strength!”

Mars ran.

The ability to put on an instant burst of speed thanks to his lightness gave him the top speed of a hawk, making it hard to even see him.

Mars ran while leaving several afterimages behind and, at the same time, cooled his opponent to stop their movements. That combo was the cornerstone of his invincibility, and up until now, there was only one person to ever break through it. It was a technique that would definitely bring victory if used. That

was—.

“Look closely in wonder! This is the secret technique of one of the Seven Luminaries, the Devil of Ice and Fire, Mars! The Ice-Prison Hellfire Instantaneous Phantasmal Devil Sword! These twin swords are my symbol! My limbs! And my secret art! Look at this sword of purgatory in my right hand! Its blade cuts through all flesh, and its fire will burn through even your soul! Look at this frozen sword in my left hand! The swordsmanship that comes from it won’t let anyone escape! The sheer cold it emits turns everyone’s hopes to dust! Now, with both swords combined, all my enemies are as trash! Now, look and be captured by my special technique! This is the strike of condemnation from a beautiful and sinister god of death that will take your life! Your freedom is stolen and your defenses shattered; I bet you can see your death coming. That is the death god of fire that mercilessly burns all! But there’s nothing to grieve about. Your suffering will only be for a moment. That is my mercy. In fact, you’ll probably be grateful to me at the moment of your death. You’ll say, ‘Ah, thank you for freeing me of this suffering!’ Think of being struck down by me as the highest honor, and fall to eternal darkness! The lid of hell has been opened just for you! See it. Now is the time for your punishment! The feast of devils; it’s your life’s curtain call! Burn, my right! Freeze, my left! Let yourself be kindly embraced by the fires of dark—”

“Shut up.”



—Mars flew through the air in a flash.

He didn't even know what happened to him.

Unable to comprehend just what kind of attack he took, the only thing Mars understood was, 'I was attacked with incredible power.'

".....No...way....."

Blood spilled out of his mouth onto the ground.

Just what happened? Just who is that, to do this to one of the Seven Luminaries with just one hit.....? —No, it wasn't just one!

That was when Mars finally realized. Out of all the over five hundred monsters that jumped at the red mantle and were blown away, not a single one was dead! They were unconscious, but every single one of them was fine.

That meant that this person had enough leeway to go easy on this many opponents. Strong enough to not kill them, but to instead purposefully miss their weak points with blunted swords and just blow them away!

"Wh-What the hell.....are you....."

As if to answer his question, black wings ran through his vision at that exact moment.

There was a single powerfully clenched fist that appeared from within the cloak. And, as a result of her arm moving, a pair of large, pitch-black wings spread out. Long hair that shined gold but flowed like fire. Deep crimson eyes. She was far too beautiful to be the god of death that killed him and too lovely to be called the Great Conqueror.

That form was unmistakably.....

".....L-Lufas.....Lufas Maphaahl.....?!"

The Black-Winged Supreme Ruler, the only one that ever scared the devil king away from completing his conquest. Mars finally realized that he had challenged an opponent he should never have challenged.

* *

I undid the clasp on my cloak and spread my wings. Instantly, I felt liberated.

Even now I just can't get used to the idea of restraining myself with my own wings. I mean, if there was anybody like that, I'd be really creeped out.

Now then, I just punched this guy as he was loitering around me spouting an insanely long speech, but is this the guy Megrez told me about? The one behind Aries? Honestly, he's not really strong, so I'm not sure, and if they're just running their mouth, anybody can do it.

.....Ahh, didn't he say something about being one of the Seven Luminaries?

"Seven Luminaries, huh? We are not familiar with that name."

"I'll explain!"

As if she was just waiting for me to ask a question, Dina suddenly teleported in.

Yeah, uhhh, you know... I'm really thankful, but has explaining things become your hobby recently or something?

"The Seven Luminaries is the title for the seven commanders supporting the devilfolk, and it was established eighty years ago. It wouldn't be too much to say that they're the strongest among the devilfolk, excepting the devil king himself and his son."

".....At this level? From what We see, this one's only level 300..."

"That just means the level of the devilfolk has also dropped. It's true that humanity lost against the devil king, but the devilfolk were bloodied, too. The other side lost almost all their strong fighters. If they hadn't, this world would have been destroyed long ago."

Ahh, I see. That answers one of my questions.

Before I wondered, 'How is it we're maintaining this equilibrium?' But now that I think about it, it was weird that I assumed the devilfolk were at the same level in the first place.

With all the high level and mid-level players that were wandering around the world, if a fight occurred that wiped all of them out, of course it'd be strange if the other side wasn't dealt a huge blow, too. In other words, my prediction of 'definitely level 1000' couldn't be farther off the mark, and the reason that Svel

was still standing was simply because its opponents were weak enough for it, too.

.....Hm? Which means..... Could it be that in the world right now, the only ones able to fight me properly are the devil king and the Twelve Heavenly Stars?

“By the way, Lufas, shouldn’t you go deal them the finishing blow? It doesn’t look like you’ve killed a single monster yet.”

“Hm? Ahh.....about that. Even We don’t feel like killing monsters that are only being used. Our enemy is only the devilfolk,” I said before lightly waving my finger.

When I did, the countless swords that blew away the monsters and were currently scattered all over the ground disappeared. It’s the opposite of alchemy. Disassembly, I’d call it?

“What are you going to do about the monsters? Now that they’ve lost their master, they’re going to return to the wild. You can’t guarantee they won’t attack people.”

“We have thought of that..... ‘Capture!’”

I activated the skill that was the foundational and most prized skill of Monster Tamers, “Capture.” Its effect was to, with a certain chance of success, capture a monster that was under a certain amount of HP or otherwise rendered unable to move and add it to the player’s forces. The number of targets a player could try to capture at once, as well as its success rate, increased along with the class’s levels, and in my case, I could capture ten at a time.

With this number, I’d have to repeat the skill over fifty times, but I had something I wanted to try. It was an underhanded trick that wasn’t available in the game but at the same time was used regularly by enemy characters.

I should be the same as Mars in the fact that I had the Monster Tamer skill to control monsters. Then there was no reason I wouldn’t be able to do what he was able to. This wasn’t the game, so there should be no rule saying, “It breaks balance, so only enemies are able to use it.”

In other words, I’m going to try to view these monsters not as individuals, but

as a group!

【Mixed Monster Army】

【Level】: ■■

【Race】: ■■

【HP】: ■■■■

【SP】: ■■■■

【STR (Strength)】: ■■■

【DEX (Dexterity)】: ■■■

【VIT (Vitality)】: ■■■

【INT (Intelligence)】: ■■■

【AGI (Agility)】: ■■■

【MND (Mind)】: ■■■

【LUK (Luck)】: ■■■

.....I did manage to do it, but what the hell is this? All the numbers look like they’re bugged. Can it not display properly since all their values as individuals are different?

Like this it’s basically impossible to understand their actual strength.

But I definitely managed to capture them. I felt the response when all the fallen monsters here became my followers. After this, I can just give them the instruction to not attack people without reason and have them return to their homes.

By the way, I have no intentions of bringing them along with me. It stands out way too much to have this many monsters following me.

“Now then. Now it’s only you—Aries.”

I turned my gaze to a spot a little ahead of me.....where Aries was standing, staring at me. His expression was the picture of complete surprise. It was the

face of someone who didn't believe what they were seeing.

Well, it's not like I couldn't sympathize. A person who'd been dead for two hundred years just suddenly appeared like nothing happened. Anybody'd want to yell, "Just who do you think you are, coming back after all this time?" But I purposefully pretended I didn't mind and approached Aries.

"What's wrong, Aries? Do you not believe your own eyes? Or do you think We are just someone that happens to look similar?"

".....Uu.....Ahh.....!"

Now then, how will Aries react?

If he calms down, that's fine. But if he starts yelling 'You're a fake!,' that'll be a little troublesome.

Honestly, I'm not great at using my words to convince anyone. No matter how high my INT stat is, that's just a measure of memory and not a person's quick-wittedness or ability to express themselves. In other words, I have something very near photographic memory, so once I commit something to memory I'll never forget it, but it's not like I can think particularly fast or anything.

"No...way..... Miss Lufas should...be dead.....! As if you'll...trick me now.....!"

"We aren't tricking you at all, though."

Well, it is true that there is some doubt whether I'm actually Lufas, though. But this body is undoubtedly Lufas', and her will still resides in it. So, that probably means that I am Lufas Maphaahl. I've got no basis for it, but there's something inside me telling me that.

So, I will say this with full certainty:

"We are certainly Lufas Maphaahl. We are not simply a doppelganger nor are we in disguise. We are not an illusion, a ghost, or a dream. If you still don't believe, then— Let's see, why not try to verify physically?" I said, cracking my knuckles.

The most certain proof that Lufas is Lufas. That would be strength.

For the face, the wings, or even the speech pattern, all of it can be copied and imitated. But this strength was something no one could imitate. I wouldn't let

anyone imitate it.

I wagged my finger, inviting Aries to try his luck.

“Come at us, Aries. We will test just how much you’ve grown these two hundred years yourself. And at the same time, We will remind you that the one standing before you right now is none other than ourself.”

“Oh—UUOOOGGGHHHHH!!!” Aries let out a roar that was filled with fighting spirit, but also sounded like a great cheer.

Just by him shouting, the air shook, conveying his strength as tingling on my skin.

I’m definitely no battle junkie. I’ve never even properly fought anyone. I don’t want to, either.

Ahh, but what is this feeling of excitement?

It’s unmistakable. Right now, I’m definitely excited. The prospect of finally having a proper ‘fight’ after coming to this world has my heart dancing.

“OOOOOHHH!”

Aries used his body’s entire weight and rushed at me.

Normally, the sight of it would scare me and I would cower. But I actually saw it as charming. It was as if a lost puppy was jumping into its owner’s arms after finding them..... I felt something like that from Aries’ actions.

Then, there was only one action for me to take.

“Hm, your desire to be coddled hasn’t changed after two hundred years, huh? Then fine, We shall embrace you.”

I took flight and stuck out a hand. At the same time, that arm made contact with Aries’ head, and I felt some force pushing back at me.

A sound like an explosion erupted, and my body was carried backwards.

As one might expect, without any feet on the ground it was hard to brace oneself, but the air was a heaven-winged’s territory. I spread my wings and flew forward.

Just that stopped Aries in his tracks, and I even started to push him back as I

placed both of my hands on his head.

“How cute.”

It was funny. I couldn't help but see this over-100-meter-tall monster sheep as a spoiled puppy or something. Or maybe something like a grown dog that's still cute no matter what? At any rate, it seems I can't bring myself to dislike him at all.

Still, Aries was huge. It probably couldn't be helped that our skinship would be a little extreme.

“Here!!”

Putting some power into my arms, I lifted Aries up. Like someone lifting up their pet and going, ‘look at how high you are!’ I lifted Aries over my head before tossing him away lightly.

The huge sheep flew through the air. Aries crashed into the ground, causing the largest earthquake today.

But it's not over. It won't end with just this. Right, Aries?

“What's next, Aries? No need to hold back. Come at us with all you have.”

I invited him to continue, and at the same time, Aries roared something that was hard to make into words.

All the wool on his body stood on end, and Aries became a flame personified that shone rainbow colors. It was Mesarthim, the skill that made Levia suffer so. And it was Aries' trump card.

It would be easy to defend against it but..... Hm, why not try taking it?

“MeeeEEEEHHH!”

After becoming a burning personification of fire, Aries charged at me, and this time, I used two hands from the get-go. When we made contact, I could feel the heat on my palms, and a heat like the middle of summer assaulted me.

Hm, I see. Even taking a flame like this, all I feel is the heat of the middle of summer. I just keep affirming how much of a cheater I am. Still, what's hot is hot. I'm basically taking no damage, but if this keeps going long enough, even I

might suffer from heatstroke or something.

All right then, let's have him take some distance.

"Hup."

I once again threw Aries, and he crashed into the ground. With that done, it was my turn.

Aries was still covered in fire, but to me, it was basically like being in the middle of summer. It wasn't like that much heat would stop me, and I could move normally. In other words, there was no problem at all.

"Let's see..... Why don't We pet you? It's been a while."

I flew above Aries and 'pet' his huge head. As a result, Aries' head slammed into the ground, and the momentum was even enough for him to bounce back up.

Next, I turned my attention to his jaw and placed my hand there, causing Aries to fly upwards. After that, I grabbed onto Aries and turned us around, petting his stomach.

Well, I say pet, but with enough power to cause Aries to slam into the ground back-first, cracking the earth.

"Now, how about it? Do you still not believe us, Aries?" I asked Aries after he picked himself up.

He replied in a low groan. "U-uuuu- urgh....."

Maybe I need to play with him some more? I thought, but that was when I was hit with a surprise attack.

Unexpectedly, Aries suddenly became a tiny person and jumped into my chest.

"WWAAAAAAHHHHHH! I'm so sorryyyyyy, Miss Lufaaasssss!!"

Aries(?) grabbed onto me, crying, while I was stiff with surprise.

He was much shorter than me, most likely around 155~160cm tall. His long hair reached down to his waist, and it was colored..... What the hell? The color changes depending on where I'm looking from. Is that a thing? Aries' limbs were

thin, and his body was covered in a white robe.

No, actually, I get the feeling that when Aries transformed into a human he was naked for a second, but Dina instantly teleported behind Aries and put a robe on him?



I tried looking over at Dina, but she was just giving me a thumbs up with a satisfied look on her face.

You.....are you actually faster than the Twelve Heavenly Stars? No, but, this is.....

It's true that Tamers have a skill to humanize monsters. I remember it, too. And I definitely gave Aries a human form.

—Mizar told me, “Boys that look like girls are all the rage these days,” so I ended up riding on that on a whim to make him look like a girl. Thanks to that, Aries' human form became something like an avatar trolls used when looking to scam guys out of money in online games, a gender scam. It was a mistake made by the old me. Damn you, Mizar.

Actually, hasn't Aries' personality changed way too much? Just where was all the pressure from before? Or is this how he is normally, and all that before was the strange part?

For now, let's peel Aries off and.....! Agh! I've got snot all over me?!

“Ahh, geez. Don't cry, don't cry. So, you're still a crybaby even after two hundred years.”

“Buh-But, but..... U-ugghu.....EEEEeeehhhhhh!!”

“Aahhhhhhhh! Okay, okay! Sorry for making you worry!”

In the end, I had to continue to comfort Aries to the best of my ability for over twenty minutes until he stopped crying.

By the way, Dina got bored after about five minutes and disappeared somewhere. And you call yourself my advisor?

After several tens of minutes, Aries finally stopped crying. He was still sniffing, but as he was we could probably actually have a conversation.

For now, Aries was safely returned to my possession and wasn't wild anymore, so I could see his stats. That meant the first thing to do was to check.

【Twelve Heavenly Stars: Aries】

【Level】: 800

【Race】: Rainbow Sheep

【Element】: Fire

【HP】: 75000

【SP】: 7600

【STR (Strength)】: 4100

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 4000

【VIT (Vitality)】: 4050

【INT (Intelligence)】: 4300

【AGI (Agility)】: 4170

【MND (Mind)】: 4294

【LUK (Luck)】: 4180

Hm.....his stats are slightly higher than what I remember? If I remember right, Aries should have had 68000 HP, but that's clearly grown. So that means he's been doing his best in his own way these two hundred years.

Still, what even stats.

Well, his stats were so low in the first place, so I was the one that raised them like a jack-of-all-trades but master of none.

By the way, his stats have been boosted a lot. Without items, all his stats would have been around 1000~1500, since he's originally a monster for production, not battle. Frankly, the correct way to use him was to not have him participate in battle at all, but keep him in the back to produce wool. I was the weird one for forcing him to fight.

"Now, have you calmed down, Aries?"

"Y-yes."

The way he looked up at me with a red nose and teary eyes didn't seem male from literally any angle.

I didn't really go for boys that looked like Aries, but Dina, who came back at some point, wasn't making any effort to hide her obvious smile. She hated orcs, but it looks like this kind of style is right in her strike zone. I feel like I'm getting to know her tastes more and more.

.....It couldn't be. There's no way that the only reason she serves me so loyally is because she likes the way I look or something like that, right?

"We are not good at explaining minor details, so We will keep this brief. We are currently on a journey to return all of the Twelve Heavenly Stars to our fold, and you are the first. Say nothing, and come. We will not allow any objections."

"Yes! Happily!"

At first, I was going to gather them all and return them to the tower, but it really was a long way from here. Or rather, if I sent this kid out alone to go there I'd be scared that he'd get lost. He's a really great supporter, and it'll probably be much better to have him come with me. With that in mind, I gave him the command to follow me.

Well, Aries seemed happy, so in the end, it seemed to be the correct choice.

"Let's do our best together again, Miss Lufas! You, too.....person I don't know! Nice to meet you!"

"—?!" Dina froze stiff in what seemed to be shock.

Ahh, yeah. Of course that'd happen if you just got called that by someone you knew.

I also went, "Who're you?" once, and Aries seems the same way.

Dina immediately restarted her systems and brought her eyes level with Aries' before talking with a smile. No, if I looked closely I could see a vein twitching on her forehead.

"Sir Aries? Do you really not remember me? Really? I've been in the tower the whole time, you know?"

"What? You were?"

"Come on, try to remember, please. I've been by Miss Lufas' side the entire time in the tower, haven't I?" Dina said, and Aries got a far off look in his eye

like he was remembering something long past.

After a while of that, he raised his voice. "Ah!"

"Could it be, that one person with no presence, who always blended into the background?"

"So cruel?!" Dina suffered another shock before turning to me, looking like she was about to cry.

No, uhh, yeah. It can't be helped, Dina. I mean, you really were background in a literal sense. You had no lines, no role, and no abilities. And if you acted the same way in this world, of course no one would remember you.

"That's surprising! So you managed to move from there!"

"Am I some sort of piece of furniture?!"

"Actually, I'm surprised you can talk!"

"Miss Lufas! He's saying such mean things even though he's got such a cute face?!"

Sorry, Dina. If you were this capable and noisy two hundred years ago, this wouldn't have happened in the first place.

Actually, why did she turn into part of the background in the first place? Could it be that she just used to be a calm sort of person who didn't show off her own identity? If that's the case, that would make her another person who changed in these two hundred years..... It might be a little too much for just a 'change' though.

For now, I really do feel sorry for her, so I guess I should throw her a bone.

"Aries. Dina has supported us with all her might ever since We came back to this world until now. Don't tease her so."

"Huh? No, I wasn't doing anything of the sort.....! I was just saying what I thought....."

"That's even worse!"

Ahh, I see. Aries is honest, for good or bad. Looks like Dina will be feeling some pain for a while.

* *

“—So, We have safely retrieved Aries. On the way, there was some guy...Mars? He said he was a Seven Luminaries or something and was really annoying, so We killed him. Be at ease.”

“.....Just what was all our effort these past several years for.....”

After retrieving Aries, I once again visited the Nobles district to see Megrez.

I was wondering how I should convince the guards, but it seemed that when we came through before Megrez told them to let me through, so we were allowed in on a ‘face pass.’ (I didn’t reveal my face, though.) It was a happy accident.

As for Aries, in his original form and his human form, his impression was way too different from that monster sheep, so he was let in without any questions whatsoever. I mean, who would even imagine that over-100-meter class giant sheep could be a boy that looked this feminine?

I’m the one who edited his looks to be this way, though.

“What happened to the monsters?”

“We have added them all to our forces. We have given them the order to not attack people without reason, so as long as your side does not provoke them you should see no troubles.”

“There should have been several hundred monsters in that castle, but..... I guess even after two hundred years the Great Conqueror’s leadership ability hasn’t declined. How scary.”

Ah, sorry. It’s probably actually declined greatly. I mean, my insides are completely different. As if I could say that, so for now I just smiled confidently.

“So, what are you going to do now?”

“Of course, We will return all the Twelve Heavenly Stars to our side. Next is.....”

Next is.....where should I go? I’m not familiar at all with this era’s geography. I’d be able to decide if all the cities were the same as the game, but unfortunately, since my country got destroyed and all the heroes started their

own, I had no idea where anything was. And so, I looked over at Dina, trying to draw an explanation out of her.

“Our next destination is the ‘Grave of the Black-Winged King.’ It’s around 500km away from here. It’s being guarded by one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars, Libra of the ‘Scales.’”

“.....From the name, it sounds like our grave.”

“Not sounds, it actually *is* your grave, Miss Lufas. It was completed 190 years ago. It’s a pyramid that is also the world’s largest building, at 108 floors total. All the people that were close to you, Lufas, took ten years to build it. At the top floor, all the equipment, weapons, and treasures you used and hoarded while you were alive are stored, and it’s been guarded by Libra, one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars, without rest all this time.”

“Oh? That Libra?”

One of the Twelve Heavenly Stars, Libra of the “Scales.” She was most likely the single most powerful golem in all of *Exgate Online*. For her materials base, I used an item that dropped off an official event boss, one that had no duplicate in the world, the “Scales of Selection.” Furthermore, I had Mizar, whose Alchemist level was 200 (he paid for it), build her instead of me to raise her level.

I’ve said before that a golem’s max level depends on the materials used to build it, and the max level for the “Scales of Selection” was 1000. And, with Mizar’s 200 Alchemist levels, the formula for the golem’s level went: $[1000/2 + 200]$. In other words, we managed to create a level 700 golem. (Golems are treated as objects, so their ownership is transferable.) On top of that, we used a rare item of limited number, “Orichalcum” (a paid item). Its effect was to, at its creation, raise a golem’s final level by 10~30% at random. Luckily, we got +30% and raised the golem’s level by 210.

In other words, Libra had a vaunted level of 910 even as a golem, and through the combined efforts of Mizar and I, was something that should truly be called a ‘super golem.’

Well, she’s still under the ‘can’t be stronger than its owner’ rule, so if I were to give Libra to a weak player she’d still get downgraded. It wasn’t a problem

with me and my 1000 levels, though.

Also, in terms of attacks, Libra is most likely the strongest out of all the Twelve Heavenly Stars..... In fact, if I mess up she could be even stronger than me. And that's because she straight-up inherited a boss's unique skill. That boss being the "Goddess's Scale" who dropped the "Scales of Selection" in the first place.

Said "Goddess's Scale" was the guardian of the divine territory that Alovenus occupied (that was the lore setting of the super-difficult dungeon), so it required a corresponding amount of strength from all the players that challenged it. It was a fearful guardian that blew away all weaklings without question. And the name of its deadly skill was "Brachium." Its effect was to apply a set amount of damage, 99999 to be exact, through all defensive skills and at perfect accuracy.

Of course, any normally raised character wouldn't be able to live after taking this attack. Even the heaven-winged or vampires, with their relatively high stats, would only reach around 70000 HP at level 1000, normally. In other words, it was a broken skill that assumed that all opponents were using stat-boosting items, meaning it mercilessly killed all but high level players. It even killed Megrez, who was a specialized backliner and thus had low HP.

It was a fiendish boss, as if its very existence was saying, "If you can't overcome this, you don't deserve to see the goddess." If I'm remembering right, the basics of the event were to defeat the fiendish guardian, overcome the crazily difficult dungeon, and meet the goddess for a reward.

So, even as a golem, that fiendish skill was alive and well. Though as one might expect, it got weaker. Unlike the boss, who would shoot it off over and over from the start of the battle, Libra was limited to only once every 24 hours. And even then, it was a fearsome threat. I vividly remember the chills I got, even as a friendly, after seeing Libra kill everyone in the first move by using the "Preemptive Strike" skill at the start of the battle to shoot it off right away.

The only problem was.....the CPU's thinking must have been bad, since Libra would use it even against small-fry if it was available. Thanks to that, there'd been trouble more than once since she was unable to use it when it was most

important.

Well, the skill clearly broke game balance, and people had complained a lot to the devs about their balancing mistake, so..... I mean, I agreed with their opinion, too. I figured it would get fixed with the next update patch, but in the end, the final battle happened before that, and I ended up here.

So she's the guardian, huh.....?

I'm not sure if there'd be any grave robbers, but if there were, I can only offer them my condolences. As it is, in this entire world probably only Levia could break past that skill.

"I've heard the rumors about Libra, too. It seems she's turned into a killing machine that massacres anyone that approaches the top floor. Apparently there were people that tried talking, but I hear it was like talking to a wall," Megrez said, looking troubled as he heaved a sigh.

Personally, I think she's better since she isn't on a rampage like Aries was, but I guess Megrez thinks differently.

"Then, would it not be fine to leave her? Is there a reason you want to rob our grave so badly?"

"There is; that's why it's a problem. People aren't the only ones that have degraded over these two hundred years. Tools and weapons, and even Alchemists, have all been decaying in quality. In particular, almost all the legendary class magic swords and armors were destroyed in the battle with the devil king, and the only ones left are all in your grave."

Legendary class weapons probably meant all the weapons made by players or rare-drop weapons. Particularly, items and weapons from official events were especially valuable since they couldn't be obtained again.

"Right now, as we're being cornered by the devilfolk, those weapons are valuable enough for people to give up an arm and a leg for. I'm not justifying grave robbing, but even so, all the weapons you have stored there could hold the key to a reversal of humanity's fortunes.But, thanks to that golem no one can lay hands on them."

Well, of course, thanks to that stupid skill that does 99999 set defense-

piercing damage.

It does have a sort of weakness in that it can't be used repeatedly, but in this age, one probably already had to risk their own life just to get up there. I seriously doubt anyone would truly be willing to deal with an attack that deals instant-death levels of damage on top of that.

"Hmmm..... We can't really bring ourselves to blame Libra on this. It's true that humanity is in trouble, but from our perspective she has simply been loyally protecting our property until our return. It should be praiseworthy, not something to condemn her over."

"I know. But if you can, I'd like it if, after you've retrieved Libra, you'd leave just what you don't think you'll use behind in your grave. I know this is a completely absurd request, though."

".....Well, We don't mind a request of that level."

It's funny, the owner of a grave who's currently alive is allowing people to rob it.

Well, for now, my next destination is set. I need to go and commend Libra for working 190 years without rest.

I tied up my hair into a ponytail and put on some glasses. Even doing that much changed my impression considerably.

As for clothes, I changed out the white dress I'd been using up until now for a white tunic and black slacks and wore my usual crimson cloak on top. However, unlike before, I simply wore it, instead of using it to cover my entire body.

Lastly, Dina wrapped my black wings in some bandages to hide them. When she did, the wings themselves mysteriously disappeared from sight, and it was no longer obvious that I was even a heaven-winged. The bandages were something Megrez had prepared, a camouflage item that he created with Alchemy. Apparently, it was imbued with "Stealth" magic, and anything wrapped in it would blend into the surroundings.

"It'd be hard to keep moving around looking as you have been, right?" Megrez said before generously gifting me some new clothes and the aforementioned bandages. I was really grateful.

“Hm... What do you think, Megrez? Does it suit us?”

“Yeah. Anything you wear suits you.”

Thanks to Megrez I didn't have to do this self-binding play anymore. It was an escape that I couldn't wish for more.

Man, honestly I didn't think he'd go this far for me. To him, I'm a sworn enemy from the past that just suddenly revived, so being enemies should have been normal. But instead, he's supporting me like this. It's so nice I'm actually starting to wonder if it's a trap.

“Say, Lufas.”

“Yes?”

“Do you.....not resent us? Back then, you were unmistakably within arm's reach of your dreams. You were just about to achieve the future you wanted. And we were the ones who betrayed you and ruined it all..... Don't you...think that's detestable?”

I sunk into thought for a small while at Megrez's question. I didn't feel any of that hatred or resentment or whatever. Of course I wouldn't. To me, that fight was just a game, and I wasn't the one that actually experienced it. So instead of answering the question, I decided to reply in my own way.

“If the people rose in rebellion, that only meant that We were not fit to be king. If you rose to action because you were unsatisfied with us, then that just meant that We were not worthy of kingship, as We drove you to that. There is not a single reason to resent you all.”

I checked myself in the mirror, striking several poses from many angles.

Yeah, this is pretty nice, isn't it? It's easy to move in, and more than anything, it doesn't make me look haughty or arrogant. As always, I wouldn't be able to avoid attention given my ridiculously good looks, but it's ten times better than being a suspicious person fully covered in a red mantle.

Man, I shouldn't be saying this about myself, but it's unfair how good I look without even any makeup..... I make an idol after being photoshopped look plain.

“So stop blaming yourself. Honestly, it hurts to even watch you.”

Lufas was an invader, and he was one of the heroes that defeated her. That was all that mattered two hundred years ago, and that’s probably how it should be.

The victors always decide everything. So the moment I lost, I lost the right to say anything, and I don’t want to either. So seeing the winning side all suffering like this is like putting the cart before the horse.

“You are a hero to the people of this country. Be proud. Like you were two hundred years ago.”

“I’ll take your advice to heart.Thanks.” A slight smile returned to Megrez’s face.

That way too serious side of his will probably have him worrying even more in the future, but I’d like to think I just made it a little better. In fact, our side is the one that needs to apologize, especially a certain sheep that’s like a walking gender scam and is currently curled up in a corner.....

But Aries threw a fit, saying, “I don’t want to apologize to anybody who betrayed Master!” And as of now, he still hasn’t uttered a single word of apology.

“Now then, it is about time for us to set off. Levia, who Aries weakened, should be fine now.”

“You have my thanks. As I am now, I can’t bring back the HP that was lost.”

It seemed that as long as there was water, the max HP that Levia lost due to Aries’ attack could be recovered. However, even though Megrez could repair Levia, he wasn’t able to alchemize more material to completely recover the lost HP, so I had to do that part.

Still, being able to recover with just water is really simply convenient. For now, all the problems with Levia should be solved.

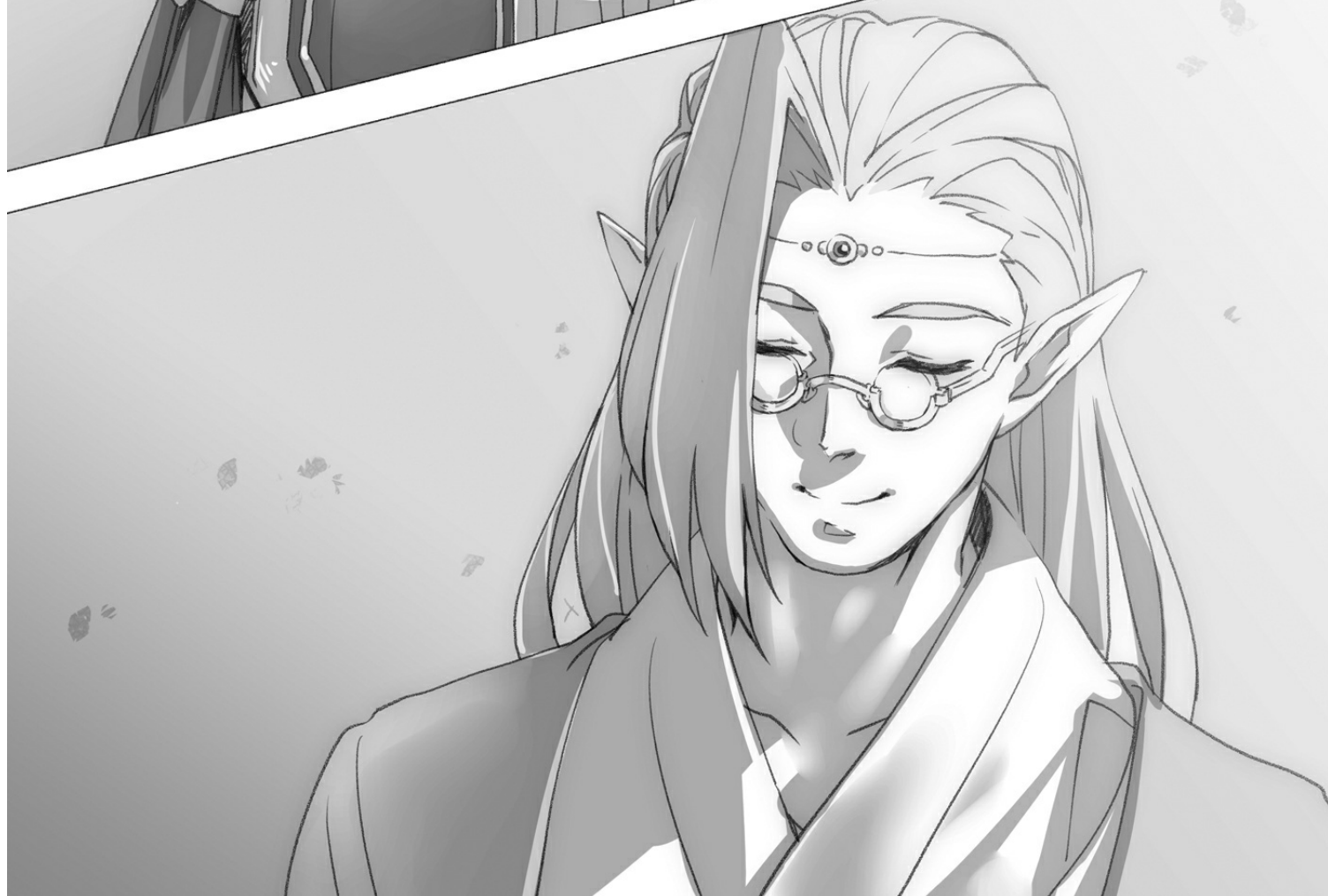
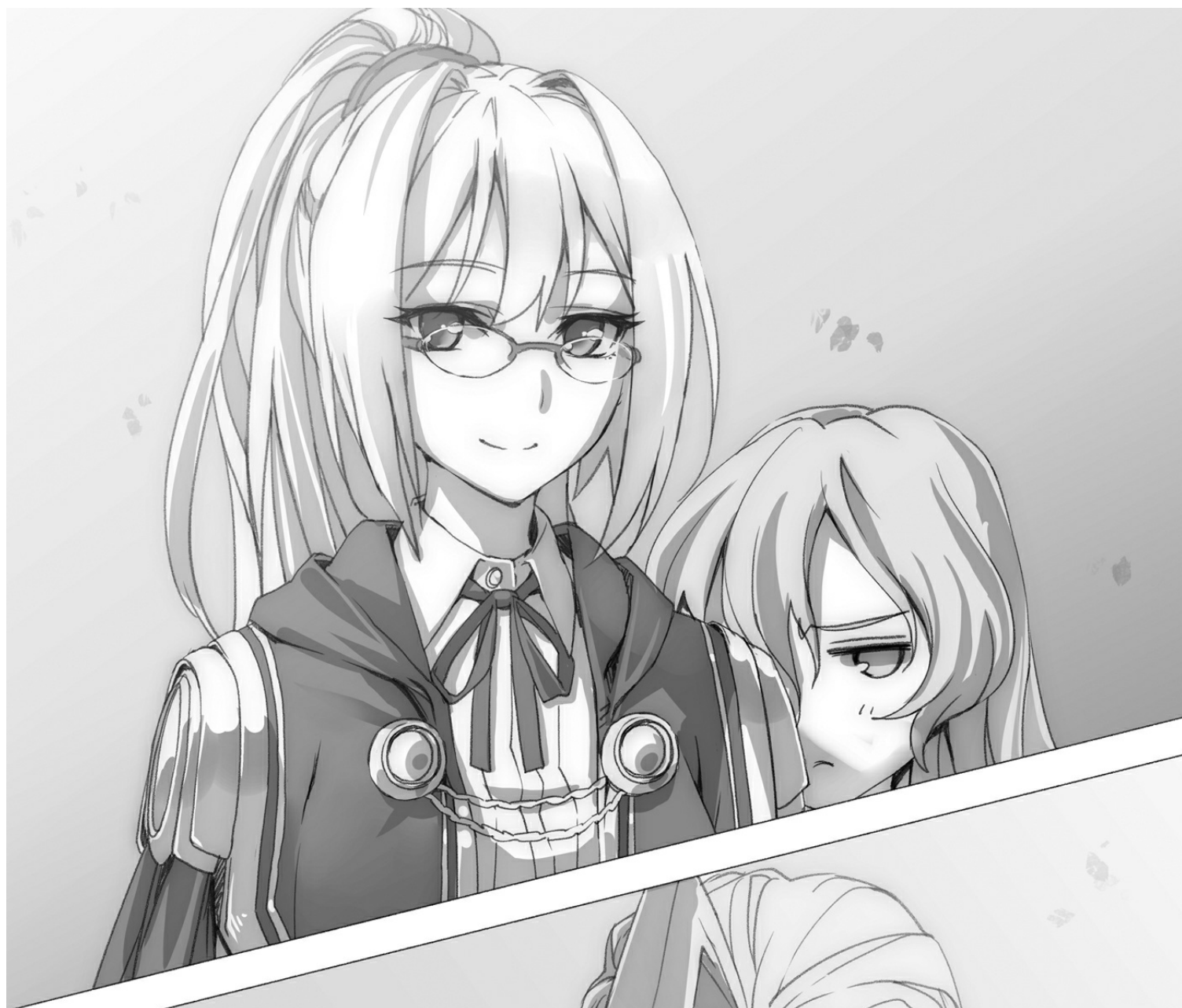
“Lufas.”

“Hm?”

“.....Nice travels.”

“Of course.”

Having been encouraged by Megrez, I couldn't help but smile. And, waving goodbye, we left Megrez's residence.



We went straight out of the Nobles district towards the Trade district. On the way, I noticed Gantz's unique, bald head, so I approached in order to say goodbye.

"Gantz!"

"Wha-oh? Huh? Woah!! A super hottie?! H-hey miss, what do you need?"

"Now now, there's no need for that kind of speech. Look, it's us. Lu—Sfalu. You took care of us when We just arrived, remember?" I said, turning Gantz speechless.

Then, the next moment, he started screaming. ".....Huh? Wha-WHAAAAAAAAAAAAAT?!" Oh yeah, I never showed Gantz how I looked.

I started to think, *This might have been a mistake*. But I immediately corrected that, since we'd be leaving anyway, so it didn't really matter.

"S-Sfalu? The super suspicious-looking one in the red mantle?! You were this hot?!"

"Hahhahhah, stop! Don't flatter us like that. We simply came to say our goodbyes. We are leaving the country now."

"You've taken good care of us, Gantz. We're returning to our travels now."

I laughed, seeing Gantz so surprised, and Dina also said her goodbyes.

Aries was..... He must have been feeling guilty, since he hid behind me and didn't even try to show his face. He's totally turned into some sort of small animal, hasn't he?

"O-oh, I see. You're leaving already? You two take care. That goes for the cute little lady behind you, too."

"He's a boy, you know?"

"Really?!"

"Hahhahhah! Well then, Gantz. Let's meet again, if the fates will it!"

"Y-yeah..... Sfalu..... No, never mind. Be well! And be careful, too!"

After saying our goodbyes, we left Svel.

At the end, it seemed like Gantz wanted to ask me something, but he never ended up saying anything. Most likely he wanted to ask about me kicking Aries back in that fight, but he probably figured we had our own problems, so he decided not to. Or, he might actually have instinctively noticed my identity.

In any case, he was a nice guy. It'd be great if he lives a long time.

"So, Dina. You said that our destination is 500km away, so what do we do? We do not mind walking."

"Yes, I have an idea! What about creating a golem for us to ride?!"

"What, you don't like walking?"

"I don't! It's tiring!"

After leaving Svel, we were currently on a plain so big I couldn't tell where it ended. At the very least, there was something resembling a road made, and thinking that I'd have to walk down it was killing my motivation.

Although, I wasn't even sure how long I'd have to walk to even start to feel tired, so it was still kind of fun in a certain way.

More than that though, isn't there a sense of romance in journeys like these?

But Dina seemed to hate the idea, and asked that I make a vehicle golem.

This was something I learned after coming here to this world, but in here, golems weren't nearly as dumb and actually had some ability to adapt. For example, in the game, golems would charge in as they pleased and use whatever attacks they liked, but here, golems are pretty smart. For example, Levia properly listened to Megrez's orders. There were also no limits to the shape golems could take. So in other words, if I made one shaped like a car I'd get a self-driving car.

So, if I were to classify Dina's request as possible or impossible, it would easily be possible.

"Hm, then We will try making one."

"If you're going to be at it anyway, make one with, like, a bed and bath and stuff inside so we don't have to camp out in the open." Dina just smoothly upgraded her request with no hesitation.

I was going to just make some sort of open topped car, but I guess now I'll have to make a motorhome.

I looked over at Aries, and although he wasn't making any requests himself, he was looking at me with eyes full of expectations. So I guess that means he's looking forward to whatever I make?

"Well, it's worth a try....."

First, for the iron that would make up most of the car, I just used whatever ore I could find lying around.

I can probably figure out furniture later. For the bath, I can just make a room for it for now and make a Goemon bath or something later. Actually, the baths in this world are all normally Goemon baths. There's no way convenient, modern baths would exist, and I don't know how those are made, either, so I can't recreate them.

For the bed.....I can use a random tree for a frame, but the problem is what to put on top. That's the only part I can't make out of trees or rocks or any of the materials for concrete that are just lying around. Things would change if I had some cotton or feathers, or maybe even wool.....

".....ah."

"? What's the matter, Miss Lufas? Is there something on my face.....?"

I had them right by me, the materials. Great. I can just have Aries turn back into a sheep later and take some wool off him.

I wouldn't say we have enough materials, but we do have the bare minimum. With this, I'll be able to make a fairly comfortable ride.

"Transmute!"

First, turn some ore into iron.

Changing material into something else that can also be used as material was one of the basics of being an Alchemist. However, the range of things a player could create depended on their class level, and there were a lot of transmutations that were unavailable to a starting Alchemist.

Alchemists at level 200, like Mizar, could get legendary class metals out of a

random rock on the ground. It's truly scary. I stopped at level 100, so I can't go that far myself, though.

I transmuted the iron I just made again and made a motorhome. Well, I'm not well versed on how cars are made either, so it's really just a car-shaped lump of iron. The movement would rely entirely on the golem's ability to move itself. There wasn't even a driver's seat.

Next, I transmuted glass from sand that was nearby to make windows. I placed several walls inside, and in one of the rooms, I put in a huge pot to serve as a Goemon bath.

While I'm at it I might as well make a kitchen, too. I can't make something nice like an electric stove, though. Instead, I made a kitchen that would fit in a bygone era, one that conformed to the level of this world's culture.

"Next is..... Aries, go back to being a sheep."

"Huh?"

"We need your wool."

Given Aries' size as a sheep, I can just cut a little bit of it off, and it'll grow back later, anyway.

I jumped on top of Aries, who followed my order and turned back into a sheep, and used chops with my hand to cut off a good amount of wool. This time I'd be using it as material for a futon. Given the level of this world, it'd be a surprisingly fluffy and luxurious bed. While I was at it, I put in some wooden chairs, too, and I also used Aries' wool to make cushions for those.

"Okay. For now, this should be fine."

There was a lot it was lacking, but it'll be fine if we just buy what we need in some city later. All it needs to do right now is move.

Let's see, I might as well check this car's stats, too. Oh, I need to give it a name, also.

Golems could be named at the moment of their creation, and in the game I'd seen several golems around the place that had some familiar names. Like Gun Om or GetOer. Stuff like that.

Right then, what should I do about this thing's name? It shouldn't be too pretentious, but also not too easy to forget.....

.....Oh it's not worth it. Tanaka's fine.

【Tanaka】

【Level】: 200

【Race】: Artificial Life Form

【HP】: 12000

【SP】: 0

【STR (Strength)】: 555

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 120

【VIT (Vitality)】: 658

【INT (Intelligence)】: 9

【AGI (Agility)】: 1020

【MND (Mind)】: 75

【LUK (Luck)】: 100

Apparently the form affects a golem's stats a little. This was something that'd be impossible in the game.

Its speed was really high, probably because I made it car-shaped. Still, AGI as a stat represents the speed of one's actions in combat, or 'Agility,' rather than movement speed, so the number doesn't necessarily mean that something is fast, no matter how high it is.

At any rate, if I were to race with it I'd still have the confidence to win, anyway.

"Wow! This is amazing, Miss Lufas! With this, the journey'll be easy." Dina, who was complaining until just now out of self-interest, stopped on a dime and switched to complimenting me.

Aries was nodding quickly in agreement with her, but in his case it looked like honest praise, so I decided to accept it graciously. But still, you need to go back to your human form. Nodding this quickly with your size is causing some serious wind.

After we all got inside, I ordered the motorhome to “Head north.” When I did, it must have understood me, because it started moving in the right direction. Now it should be smooth sailing until we get where we’re going.

“Ah, right. Then I’ll be procuring the furniture we’ll need. I’ll go teleport off for a bit and buy it, so please wait,” Dina said, before disappearing without even waiting for my reply.

It’s as convenient as always, that teleportation magic. I’m so jealous.

Actually, this might be a bit late, but if Dina could teleport why did we have to ride a carriage all the way to Svel? I could have just flown there. Even if I left her behind, she’d just catch up with teleportation, anyway. Well, it’s too late now, and Aries is here, too, so that option’s no longer on the table.

Oh man, why did it take me so long to realize? I’m really dropping the ball, aren’t I?

Well, whatever. For now let’s keep messing with this interior.

* *

“Hahhh!Hahhh.....!”

At the foot of the Gheil Volcano.

There, a young boy was forcing his body to move, crawling along on the ground while leaving behind a trail of blood.

It was just one hit—as if swatting away an annoying bug—the boy only took one hit like that.

Even so, he was left unable to even stand up. Like a bug, he crawled along, desperately and embarrassingly, trying to run away from an opponent who was already long gone.

“L-Lufas Maphaahl is..... The only demon *he* ever feared, is back..... She, she’s a nightmare..... This, this is.....”

He was lucky to be level 300. Either that, or he was only alive because Lufas honestly didn't care about him and only bothered to use a minimum amount of power. Lufas didn't even recognize him as a proper enemy. That was certainly humiliating. But it was also undoubtedly good luck. Thanks to that, right now he was still alive.

Although that luck wouldn't be continuing for long.

“—Oh my. So you were still alive?”

He heard a voice, condescending and so cold it chilled deep into his bones.

Mars used all his remaining might to turn his malfunctioning body towards the owner of the voice and saw a blue-haired girl standing before him. Thanks to the sun behind her, he couldn't see her face properly, but somehow the modest, white dress she was wearing seemed much finer than it looked at first glance.

Maybe it was thanks to her elegance? Or maybe it should be called the sheer weight of her presence?

At any rate, there was something mysterious about the girl that couldn't be fully explained in words.

However, her face—no, the ends of her mouth were drawn up in a semicircle like a half moon. Her expression was filled with joy.

“No no, that's no good at all. Actors whose parts are over need to leave the stage cleanly. No one benefits from a piece that should have been defeated coming back later to try to earn points. Once your role is done, you should leave. Those are the rules of the game.”

“Y-you are.....! Just what are-.....”

With a giggle, the girl ridiculed the poor clown who lost his place on the stage. She had no words to waste on answering his questions.

There was the idea of 'a present for the afterlife,' but unfortunately, she didn't have that sort of troublesome spirit of customer service.

Simply, quickly, and beautifully. As if plucking weeds, she made the idiot who failed to even die disappear.

The only disposition the girl had was of cruelty.

“Goodbye, Mars. You pitiful NPC.”

—Several seconds later, there was no boy there. All traces of him were gone, as if he had never existed in the first place. There wasn't even a strand of hair left. And the girl who made that happen was also, similarly, no longer there.

Short Story: A Wild Demon Appeared!

—If children don't stay good, a demon will come to get you!

A black-winged demon will come visit all the bad children and carry them off somewhere.

It brings along twelve stars and will chase you to the ends of the earth.

So, boy, listen well to your papa and your mama, and be a good child.

That was a common tale used to scare children. A simple but loving tale with no twists used to tell children to stay good or else something scary will turn up for all the bad ones.

Such stories existed everywhere on earth, and every region had a similar story, each with its own name and face.

Scotland had its bogeyman.

Portugal had the Sack Man.

Germany had the Schwarzer Mann.

And Japan had the namahage.

They were terribly effective at scaring children into doing what they were told.

Children, with no frame of reference or life experience, were incredibly pure and quick to believe. Children started to learn with what their parents told them. That was why, for children with no knowledge of the difference between the realistic and the unrealistic, whatever their parents said became the truth. That was why they believed, feared, and obeyed.

Here, in Mizgarz, there was no exception, and basically, all areas of the world had the "Black-Winged Demon" fulfill that role. That was all it was.

However, the only difference was that the Black-Winged Demon really

existed.

A little ways away from the Trade City of Ydalir lay a small village. Its name was Ale village. It was named after a legend that said that in the past, there was a valkyrie by the name of Ale who was said to be the agent of the goddess who descended upon this place, but the truth of the legend was unknown.

Inside that village, a single boy was running energetically. That boy, who laughed uproariously as he ran, held an ale fruit, which was being grown in the village.

Said fruit, which was the village's specialty, was said to have been brought by the valkyrie Ale, whom the goddess sent with the fruit after taking pity on the people who were dying of drought. It was sweet, full of nutrients, and grew regardless of the season, even in slightly barren land.

Of course, there was a limit, and it wouldn't grow in a complete wasteland, but the fruit was still easier to grow than most, and it was one of the most popular fruits in Mizgarz. Wrapped in a green skin, the fruit stored a lot of moisture, and it was a much more reliable source of hydration than standing water, which could be filled with disease or parasites.

The boy, who'd stolen one of these fruits, ran with an expression like he wasn't feeling guilty at all. Adults ran after him while yelling, but the agile boy quickly escaped from their pursuit.

"F-Fuck! That damn Bikke! Spry brat!"

"Damn that little prankster! He even laid his hands on my goods!"

The villagers shouted hatefully, watching the retreating back of a child.

The fact that children are so energetic is a sign of peace, so energetic children are a village's treasure. However, that doesn't excuse pranks, not to mention stealing fruits that are the village's lifeline.

Luckily, he didn't steal enough to cause the village to starve, but it wasn't as if Bikke understood that; it was just that since he was a child he didn't eat that much.

Ale fruit was extremely important given the size of the village. It lined the

tables of every family at every meal, and the money earned by selling it to merchants from Ydalir went straight into the living expenses of the village. So the fact that Bikke hadn't been exiled from the village up until now was a testament to the character of the village's people. But even that had a limit.

"Elan, he's your kid, right?! You have to discipline him!"

"S-Sorry... I keep lecturing him at home, but he just doesn't listen. I even told him the story of the Black-Winged Demon to scare him..."

"That only works on the really young ones. At his age, there's no point to it."

The man called Elan looked weak-willed as he bowed his head over and over to try to appease everyone. He might've been the one who'd taken the most damage from Bikke's pranks.

"Geez. We're lowering your family's share, got it?"

"Wh-What? Nooo..."

"Of course it's happening, idiot! It's your responsibility to pay back everything that brat steals!"

All the men there jeered at Elan before leaving while still venting their frustrations.

The boy, Bikke, was a famous prankster in the village.

He'd already cried wolf about monsters coming more than once or twice, and he'd stolen things, like this time's fruit, before as well. He'd thrown bugs into people's houses or flipped girls' skirts who were the same age as him. These things were a daily occurrence.

Either he just liked seeing people distressed, or he got some kind of twisted pleasure from causing people trouble..... The reason was unknown, but at any rate, the pranks that always went slightly over the line continued daily. Some fairy tale meant to scare children had no effect, and the boy Bikke grew arrogant, saying, "Nothing like that exists."

In truth, no matter how many bad things he'd done up until now, no black-winged demon had ever showed up. That was why he'd realized long ago that it was just a lie told by his parents. However, he was still just a child. He didn't

really understand what it meant to cause people trouble. It was just fun to see people panic, so he kept doing it. He never even considered just how much damage his actions were causing and how hard he was making things for his parents.

Even for the fruit, the only thought he had was: *There's so many of them, it's fine if I take one, right?*

Of course there would be no guilt born from that. In fact, he arbitrarily decided that any adults that didn't let him have it were stingy butts. He didn't yet understand the concept of selling it for profit or the concept of saving money. He only figured that the adults were hoarding all the fruit for themselves to eat.

That was why he never regretted his pranks up until now. He never thought they were bad. And he never expected to regret them, either.

As long as those peaceful days continued, at least.

“Wah?!”

The boy Bikke, who was biting into the fruit as he ran, collided with an adult's leg near the entrance to the village. It happened because he wasn't paying attention to where he was going. He never expected to run into something where he did.

The boy looked upwards, while his mind was screaming: *Crap! I'll get caught by the adults and get yelled at. I'm done for.*

He thought that the only thing left to do was see who'd caught him and hope for leniency, depending on who it was. If it was the kind and good-humored Uncle Fren, then it would be better than nothing. If it was the angry Uncle Lang, then he'd get a fist to the head.

Even though he felt no guilt for committing mischief, Bikke was scared of punishment.

With those selfish thoughts in his head, the boy looked up and found not someone from the village but an unfamiliar adult.

It was a man who looked generally drab, with filthy spots here and there. He

had an unkempt beard and wore armor. But that armor wasn't pretty. In the first place, the colors were all over the place. It was a slapdash set that looked like it'd been cobbled together randomly from parts that looked good out of soldiers that belonged to many different countries. For example, his helmet was green, but his pauldrons were red, and his chestplate was blue.

And more than anything, he stank.

Baths and showers and the like weren't common in this world, and it was normal to go several days without washing oneself. However, this man's stench was different. It was like he stank of iron and oil. And that combined with the unwashed stink of a middle-aged man, it became an awful bouquet.

And along with the man in front, there were four others for a total of five unknown, stinky men blocking the boy's way.

"Ho? What an energetic little boy. Is he from this village?"

The deep voice caused the boy to tremble.

Are they travelers? Or soldiers from the capital? No, no way. The boy was ignorant, but even then, he could somehow tell they weren't travelers or proper soldiers. It was his child's intuition, or something like that. At any rate, the boy instinctively understood that these men were bad for the village.

"You see, all of us are travelers. How about it? Why don't you show us the way to your village?"

"N-No! Don't wanna!"

Bikke turned right around and ran back where he came from.

It wasn't as if the boy realized what those men were. If it were an adult instead of Bikke, they'd be able to tell instantly that they were bandits, but the boy didn't have that knowledge. He didn't even understand that the armor they were wearing was probably scavenged from dead bodies after a battle.

Even so he was sensitive to danger because he was a child. He could at least understand that the men gave off an abnormal air. That was why the boy ran. He ran to find adults from the village.

"E-Everyone! Trouble! There's trouble!"

“Oh? If it isn’t Bikke! How dare you steal that fruit! You sure have some guts to come back yourself! I won’t forgive you this time; you’re getting ten spankings! Prepare yourself!”

“N-now’s not the time for that, Uncle! Some weird people came to the village! They’re not normal!”

Even though the boy tried to explain, it was unintelligible, and there was no way for an adult to get anything from it. The only thing Lang could get was that someone had come to the village, but..... In the end, Bikke was the one telling him, and Bikke had multiple previous offenses. He’d already lied before that travelers had come or that monsters had come. At any rate, the villagers had all been tricked more than once.

That was why Lang didn’t believe him. He figured that the reason Bikke couldn’t explain well was because he couldn’t come up with a good lie. That’s what Lang thought.

“You won’t get out of punishment by lying like that. I got spanked by Grandma in the old days, too, when I caused mischief. Children learn what’s right by experiencing pain like this. Now go sit there, Bikke. Be prepared to not be able to sit down for the rest of the day.”

Uncle Lang blew into his hand to warm it up as he approached Bikke. But before he got there, he stopped, and his eyes opened wide.

Behind Bikke, only a scant 10-odd meters away, were some men approaching who clearly looked like bandits.

Bikke was telling the truth. Something terrible for the village had happened.

Uncle Lang picked up a nearby shovel and hoe before grabbing Bikke and throwing the boy behind him.

“R-Run, Bikke! Go tell everyone what happened!”

“U-Uncle!”

“Hurry up and go! You’re in the way!”

Bikke normally thought Uncle Lang was scary, but right now, he wasn’t. That was because way scarier men than Uncle Lang had come.

Bikke stood up almost like he bounced off the ground and started running again.

Uncle Lang should be fine! He's so big, and he can pick up such heavy things!

Unfortunately, Bikke had never seen anything stronger than Uncle Lang before. That was why he didn't even understand that Uncle Lang, who was just a villager, stood no chance against bandits. He didn't understand that Lang sacrificed himself to let him escape.

He would later regret his optimistic and naive thinking, that he simply thought Lang would be OK.

"M-Mom! It's terrible!"

Bikke opened the door and flew into the wooden house.

The house was really spacious for a villager's home in this world, and inside there were five small tables arranged around the room, as well as a counter at the opposite end of the door. The second floor was an inn for travelers, but they basically had no customers.

Bikke's mistake was going straight for his home and relying on his mother. Thinking normally, a person should first find some of the men of the village who could actually fight. The best thing that would happen after letting his mother know would be that she would let others know. It would just double the required effort. It was also a clear time loss, given that there was now another step before alerting the men.

However, at the same time, Bikke also made the correct choice in relying on his mother.

"Come now, Bikke. Be quiet. There are travelers present right now."

"Ah, hello. Sorry for intruding."

Bikke's house was the only inn available for travelers in the village. Normally, there were no customers, but in a rare turn of luck there were two travelers sitting at the counter right now.

One was a pretty girl with sea-blue hair that hung down to her waist. And the other was a strange person who covered their whole body in a red cloak and hid

their face in a hood.

Normally, Bikke would be all over the travelers out of curiosity, but right now, he didn't have time for that.

"I-it's terrible, Mom! Some weird guys came to the village!"

"Huh? Are we weird people?"

".....Well, We cannot deny it."

The two travelers responded to Bikke, but he quickly denied what they said.
"It's not you guys!"

No, it's true these travelers are strange (especially that one in the red mantle), but now's not the time for that!

"No, it's those old guys in the dirty armor! Uncle Lang told me to go tell everyone.....!"

".....How many times have I told you to stop it with those lies, Bikke? If you don't shape up already I really will get mad at you."

"It's true, Mom! Believe me!"

Even though Bikke argued as hard as he could, his mother didn't take him seriously at all. It was the result of him lying so much up until now. It all bounced back at him.

It's probably just a lie. He's probably just pranking us, she thought, convinced, and wouldn't give him the time of day at all.

Bikke got what he deserved. All of it was just karma. However, even though Bikke knew that, he had to keep saying it.

"Yes yes, keep going later, okay? I'm busy right now."

"Now wait a second, ma'am." Seeing the mother not give Bikke the time of day, the traveler in the red mantle spoke up. Surprisingly, it was the voice of a woman, and it was shockingly clear. "We do not understand your circumstances, but you should not ignore your child so when he is so desperate. Also, if it is true, then this is an emergency. We will accompany you."

"Huh? But, Miss, that's....."

“Not to worry. Even if he is tricking us, we will not be angry. It will simply be a tale to tell over drinks, that we were tricked by a child’s prank.”

The traveler slowly got up, and the blue-haired girl followed suit. Then, the traveler looked down at Bikke and quietly asked:

“So, child. Where are those strange men?”

“Th-This way!”

This was also a mistake on Bikke’s part. Just what was he going to try, bringing only two women along with him? Doing what Bikke did would just uselessly increase the number of victims. It could only be called a foolish act.

They’re adults, so they’ll do something about this!

A thought all children had in their heads, a simple, foolish thought that only existed during childhood.

Prodded into action, he led the two women before a pack of hungry wolves.

By the time Bikke came back, Uncle Lang was already at death’s door. On the other hand, the suspicious men sported no wounds whatsoever and were laughing derisively as they kicked and stomped on Uncle Lang, playing with him.

“Oh? If it isn’t that kid from earlier. So, you came back.”

“Nice, hey, look at that! Women. And pretty good ones, too.”

“A woman and.....the heck is that? A red mantle? What did you think would happen, bringing them here, huh?”

“Heheheh, maybe a strip show?”

“Naw, that’s too harsh. Let’s kindly strip her ourselves.”

The men got excited over the appearance of new toys, and they left Uncle Lang alone to approach the women.

Bikke started trembling, and the blue-haired girl cried out in fear while hiding behind the red mantle. The only one who wasn’t intimidated was the suspicious figure in the red mantle.

“Th-this is bad, Miss Lufas! If this keeps up, I’ll become like a doujin! You can’t show that to children!”

“You will be fine, won’t you? Probably.”

“How cruel?! Come on, save me!”

But the red mantle remained composed for some reason. And somehow, to the boy, the blue-haired girl also looked composed. Actually, to him it looked like she was joking around.

A seed of doubt may have been implanted in the bandits; they might have wondered just what was going on. However, it was already too late. They were already close to their prey. It took too long to realize they’d waltzed right into a predator’s jaws.

“—‘Sit.’”

Just one word. The red mantle simply uttered one word.

And that settled everything.

The same time she spoke, the surroundings were all inundated with an invisible pressure, as if a giant arm were pushing everyone down into the ground.

It wasn’t as if the red mantle even attacked. She didn’t use magic, either, nor did she manipulate any wind. It was just a sense of intimidation. A difference in their existences. An absolute wall that they could never surpass.

She just made it really easy to understand, slamming the difference into her opponent’s survival instincts. That they mustn’t defy her, they mustn’t oppose her, they must bow down instead of stand up.

Their instincts, realizing this, ignored her opponent’s will and directly moved their bodies, causing them to take a pose of submission. Their brains continually output fear on their own, and they all froze without even being able to understand why.

Before the boy even noticed, the men turned into a simple group of sacrifices who could only tremble and shake.

“Well, it was fine to shut them up, but what do We do with them?”

“Leave that to me, please. I’ll just mess with their memories real quick and have them go home.”

The blue-haired girl jogged over to the trembling men and peered into each of their eyes, one by one.

Bikke was keeping an eye on the situation even while lying on the ground, and eventually, the girl must have finished her work, because the invisible pressure that had been holding them down this entire time disappeared.

Feeling the mysterious sensation of his body finally becoming lighter, he looked up at the red mantle. At her feet, there were a couple of black feathers that had fallen onto the ground even though there were no birds nearby. Moved by curiosity, the boy pulled aside the mantle to take a look.

This was the height of a child's indiscretion. If Bikke were an adult, he'd immediately consider what would happen if he angered someone who could do all that and would stop whatever he was going to do.

As a result, he saw something even more frightening that he should never have laid eyes on.

—A pair of black wings hidden underneath the mantle.

"Hihh?!!" He reflexively screamed, before losing power in his legs and falling to the ground.

He thought it was just a fairy tale this whole time. He believed that the Black-Winged Demon was just a made-up story. But that was wrong; she existed. Right here, right now.

"Ah, hey..... What a mischievous child. We'd appreciate it if you didn't go around telling people what you just saw."

"Ah, y-yeah, sure."

As Bikke sat there trembling, the men all slowly got up. Even though the boy was scared and surprised, he could tell that the men were acting strange.

Their eyes seemed blank, they were drooling, and it was as if they weren't seeing what was right in front of them. Eventually, the men, with their eyes that would not focus, started barking.

".....Bow!!"

"Wan wan!"

“Bark!!”

As if they even forgot that they were human, they moved around on all fours and ran off together while barking. Their tongues lolled out of their mouths, and the sight of the men running like dogs while spreading drool everywhere was incredibly funny as well as scary.

The red mantle, who saw the men off, asked the blue-haired woman exasperatedly:

“Hey, Dina, what did you do?”

“I overlaid their memories with those of a dog. Right now, they think they’re dogs.”

“But like that, would they not notice? Since their forms are so different.”

“It’s fine. When that happens they’ll just assume on their own that they’re ‘dogs that became human for some reason.’”

“That’s just nasty.”

Bikke saw what happened and thought: *They’ve been taken away. They surely got their hearts as humans stolen away by the fearful demon or something. That’s why they became like that. No doubt.*

“Well, the whelp here saw our wings, so We cannot stay for long. Let’s go, Dina.”

“E-Even though I thought we’d finally be able to sleep on a bed instead of in a carriage..... You’re too careless, Miss Lufas!”

“Sorry, sorry. We will transmute something for us to sleep on, so forgive us.Ah, that’s no good. We don’t have any resources.”

The two started talking about something as they started walking away, but suddenly the blue-haired girl turned her eyes to Uncle Lang, and she spread something like particles of light onto him. When she did, the man’s wounds healed in an instant, and after that, the two of them actually left the village.

After a while, Bikke’s mother came running, but everything was already over. All the woman saw was Uncle Lang lying down on the side of the road and her own child, still shocked.

Well, Uncle Lang was there so he probably wouldn't be treated like a liar.

".....Mom."

"Bikke! What's wrong? What happened?!"

"The men, they were taken away."

"What?"

"What you said was true, Mom. Those old guys were bad, so the Black-Winged Demon took them away.I'm going to be good from now on. I won't play pranks anymore."

Unable to understand what her son just said and not knowing what just happened, the woman could only tilt her head in confusion. She didn't know just how much danger the village had been in. As well as how that danger was avoided.

However, the black feather her son was absentmindedly gripping for dear life left a deep impression.

* *

The children ran through the village. Their faces were plastered with smiles, and they held ale fruits that were pilfered from the adults.

In this world, where pastries and confectioneries could only be enjoyed regularly by some nobles and the extremely wealthy, the main form of sweets that children liked were fruits. And Ale village had an especially large amount of fruit, and it would be the first thing children would say they liked.

Of course, the fruit was the village's lifeline, and stealing it was definitely not a good thing.

However, children wanted what they wanted. And they wanted to eat what they wanted to eat. Being so true to their desires was definitely a defining quality of children.

However, a larger child blocked those children's way, and they were quickly captured.

"Hey! You can't do that! You shouldn't be stealing the ale fruits that the

uncles all worked so hard to raise!”

“B-but, big bro Bikke, we’re hungry…….”

“Then you need to properly ask them to give it to you. Stealing is bad.”

The one who stopped them was Bikke, who was only up until recently an even bigger problem child than they were.

It was unclear just what happened, but one day he basically changed into a completely different person overnight. He became much more honest and serious and profusely apologized for all the mischief he’d caused up until then. In fact, he even started acting like a big brother, scolding the other children whenever they did something wrong. And though his parents were extremely happy that their son grew up, they still held some doubts at the sudden change.

“Listen up! You all need to be good. If you aren’t, a black-winged demon will come and take you away somewhere.”

Every time Bikke scolded the other children, he’d always show them a single black feather.

The feather he picked up that day was a precious proof to warn him and make sure that he never forgot what happened. It was solid proof that it wasn’t a dream or an illusion. So, with one hand, the grown boy stopped the other children who tried to commit the same mistakes he once did.

And he spoke a fearsome tale that was definitely no lie or exaggeration.

—If you don’t stay a good child, a demon will come get you.

A demon with black wings will come for any bad children, and whisk them off somewhere.

The demon brings along twelve stars, and will chase bad children to the ends of the earth.

So, boys, listen to your papa and mama, and be good.

Short Story: A Wild Dinosaur Appeared!

According to legend, the world used to have no mana when the people of heaven descended onto Vanaheim, a mountain that soared into the sky.

They watched over the world, and took on the duty of gathering the world's impurity. They formed forbidden golden apples, which were made of concentrated impure mana.

Once, out of curiosity, someone ate a golden apple, and the person, whose body became infected with mana, was exiled from Vanaheim and became human.

That was when the people of heaven incurred the displeasure of god, and from then on, they became unable to cleanse the world of impurities. That was why the world overflowed with mana, and Mizgarz ceased to be a paradise.

Humans, who were cast to the earth, spread to every corner of the world, and they each started to change in their own environments.

The ones who continued to eat beasts that were full of mana became beastmen.

The ones who descended to Helheim, the world's hell that was filled with impurities, became vampires.

The ones who ran free across wide plains became halflings, and those people further split into those who holed up in caves to become dwarves.

And the ones who lived in forests, staying in contact with nature that was filled with mana, became elves.

That was considered the beginning of the world.

—[From: *History of Mizgarz Part 1: The Secret of the Birth of the Seven Races*]

There were seven races of humanity living in Mizgarz.

Beastmen, or therianthropes, lived on the plains, while the heaven-winged lived on high mountains. Dwarves lived in caves, and halflings lived a nomadic life with no fixed home. Humans lived anywhere they liked, while vampires resided in the dark. And elves could be found in the forest. That was the common sense of this world.

It wasn't decided on by anyone in particular. It was simply a result of their inborn instincts telling them which places were easiest to live in. If there were someone who decided this, it would have to be the goddess that birthed them all.

That's why no one doubted anything and simply lived like it was natural.

But among those people, a certain young man named Megrez was one of the few who doubted what was 'natural.'

Elves lived in the forest. They were born in the forest and died there, too. They spent peaceful, unchanging days in the forest. They lived off of a small amount of grain, didn't fight, and didn't change. Every single day for however many years, decades, or centuries, they simply existed.

What the hell? This is way too boring. Are we plants or something? If we're going to keep spending every single day without change like this, then there's no point in being part of humanity, right?

It made Megrez want to tell people, "Then why don't you just turn into a tree?!"

Why do we have hands? Why do we have legs? Why do we have heads, and magic, too?

If you want an unchanging life so bad just become a plant or something. Change into something like a tree and live your entire life carefree like that.

'These unchanging days are the most precious thing. Peace is happiness.'
That's what every old elf parrots back at me.

Sure, it's true that peace is important. If peace continues, then there'll be no large amounts of pain or deep despair, either.

But if nothing ever changes, then that means there'll be no great joy, either. A life with no ups or downs. Just a flat existence.

Megrez didn't especially reject the idea of it. After all, everybody had their own feelings and opinions.

However, at the very least, Megrez hated the idea.

I was gifted with eyes, so I want to see so many different things. And I have ears, so I want to hear so many sounds. I want to touch with these hands, walk with these feet, and feel things directly on my skin.

With those feelings, Megrez left his home forest.

Nothing really led up to it, and he didn't have any real goal, either. He didn't even have a destination; he was just a young man who left his forest with vague and obscure dreams.

Later, Megrez would look back on those times and lament about how unplanned everything was. The young man that would later be called the Wise King was still a simple, honest youngster back then.

Megrez, who left the forest without any plans or prospects, eventually ended up in the Trade City of Ydalir, and, of course, he got lost there.

Elves always fundamentally lived self-sufficiently and would help each other frequently. That was why, to them, it was natural to share when someone was in need, and even when wanting compensation, it was done through trading goods.

In other words, Megrez hadn't learned the value of currency yet.

In the first place, he had no familiarity with the concept of using small circular lumps of copper or silver to 'buy' things. He did have knowledge of it, at least. Megrez had heard that in human towns they obtained things by doing that, and he had seen the merchants that dropped by the forest every once in a while do the same with the elders of the forest, too.

However, in the end, he only knew of it and never placed much importance on actually learning more. Knowing and understanding were similar, but two completely different things. That's why Megrez left with no money to his name,

and was left at a loss at not being able to get anything.

“N-No way..... To get things in a human town, you need..... No, I can’t even get a place to sleep for a night without money?!”

The one who would later be crowned the Wise King was utterly surprised by a simple fact that was obvious even to children.

If a certain person that was hailed as the Wise King in the future were to see this, he’d probably faint.

Of course, Megrez wasn’t joking around. He was, in fact, extremely serious. He was seriously surprised and troubled.

However, to the people that saw him he simply looked like an idiot with no common sense, and they would only think, *What’s an elf doing here?*

At any rate, Megrez regrouped. He at least understood that the first thing he had to do was obtain money. Without money, he couldn’t get food nor a place to sleep.

Just in case, Megrez had the food and water he brought from his forest, but there was a very limited amount he could carry with his low physical strength, so it would probably last three days at best.

There was a limit to how unprepared someone could be.

“H-Hey, you!”

“Huh? Me?”

Megrez understood that he needed money. However, he had no idea how to go about getting money. And if he didn’t know, he just had to ask. It could be said to be a correct decision.

The person would probably think the question was so obvious even a child could answer it, but anyway, Megrez did the right thing.

Megrez stopped a young man with spiked black hair, wearing some cheap armor. The young man wasn’t ugly by any means. In fact, he’d be considered pretty hot for a guy, but thanks to him being generally a little filthy, it was all wasted. At the very least, he probably wasn’t a person that worked and lived in town normally.

Having to rely on someone who looked like that showed that Megrez was probably backed into a pretty tight corner.

“It’s embarrassing, but I just came here from my forest, so I’m not very familiar with human towns. How do people earn money?”

“Money?I mean, what other way is there but work? Though, I only know one place that’d suddenly hire someone nobody knows like you.”

“There is one? Then please, show me to this place.”

“Ahhh, I don’t mind, but.....are you sure? It can’t be called good work, even if I’m stretching it.”

“I don’t mind.”

More than anything, Megrez needed money.

At this rate, he wouldn’t be able to live in town. And if that happened, he’d have no choice but to return to the forest, which would be far too embarrassing to do after he had mouthed off like he did before leaving. It’d only been a few days since he did that, after all. If he actually returned, it was clear he’d become a laughingstock, and among elves, who had very few ways to entertain themselves, that status would last for several decades.

Humans would forget after 75 days, but elves remembered for 75 years. In other words, he’d be laughed at and ridiculed for 75 years. And that was something Megrez couldn’t take.

“Then, well, I’ll introduce you, but..... Don’t hate me for this,” the young man said before showing him to a dingy-looking bar.

It was dirty and reeked of booze. Megrez’s first impression was one of filth. It could be summed up in that single word.

It seemed like the first floor was used as a canteen, but from the bottom of his heart, Megrez thought, *It’s amazing that they can stomach eating here.*

It reeked of grease and fat everywhere, the stink of booze filled the air, and the men that were loitering were the worst. The stench of their cheap armor was awful, and they were stained with the stench of blood and fat. They must not have washed in some time, as they really did smell just as much as they

looked—like a bed of disease.

It stinks! It stinks! It stinks! More than anything, it stinks so bad I can't stand it!

“Wh-What is this place, a cesspool? Is the job you're introducing me to cleaning up a cesspool?”

“Ahh, a cesspool, huh? Well, that's not wrong. In truth, there are some jobs that are close to that. If you value your life, then it is an option to just take dirty jobs like that.”

“D-don't joke with me!”

“It's better than dying and being eaten before being shat out, right?”

The young man stepped over to the counter and sat in an empty space. For a while, Megrez couldn't figure out what to do, but the young man was beckoning him with his hand, so he took the seat next to the young man.

The chairs were in an awful state, too. Just by sitting down, they creaked and groaned.

“Adventurers, or in other words, people who sell their lives at a massive discount. There are no conditions at all to become one. Even if you're a slave or have no physical ID and are homeless, you'll be accepted without question. However, no matter what happens, it's all your responsibility. No matter if you die or are injured, no one's going to take responsibility for it.”

“It's not exactly without conditions.”

The master behind the counter cut in in the middle of the young man's explanation. He was a stern-faced man with his white hair all slicked back.

He started adding on to the explanation while polishing a glass.

“It's true that there are some places that accept newbies with no conditions, but at the very least, it's different here. Dying as an adventurer is the adventurer's own responsibility, but if they fail the job that was given to them, it's our reputation that suffers. That's why if you lack ability, I'll only give you stuff like chores.”

“So he says. Isn't that great? Even without any ability you can at least get

some chores to do.”

Adventurer.....Megrez had heard that word before.

In other words, they were the bottom of human society. Or, small-time punks. Or, walking dead.It wouldn't be strange for any of them to drop dead tomorrow. In fact, it was rare for adventurers to leave a corpse. That's why they didn't need burials or prayers.

It was an awful, shitty job that sounded worse the more Megrez heard about it. Just the worst occupation. That was the job of 'Adventurer.'

Megrez had no money, so he would become an adventurer. However, because he had no money, he couldn't buy a sword or armor or anything else. And because he couldn't complete requests like that, he'd just die. If he at least had the money to get equipment, well, he wouldn't be dipping his hands into such a mob-like job in the first place.

If he had the ability to fight monsters, then he could try for being a mercenary, part of a volunteer security organization, or even a knight.

That's why all the ones who became adventurers were half-assed. Only useless people would gather, and every day their faces would change. And because the job was like that, it didn't need any sort of conditions to it.

In fact, if someone with any sort of societal status and ID were to become an adventurer and die, it would be a problem. If some noble kid became an adventurer on a lark and died because of it, that bar would be inundated with terrible rumors. Or the nobles might unleash assassins in their anger.

That's why nobody had any ID. It was better not to have one. The more one became someone no one would miss, even if they disappeared tomorrow, the more they were fit to be an adventurer. The job of adventurer was like a last bastion for those unwanted by society.

“Right then. I'll be judging your ability. Come with me to the back.”

“G-got it.” With a gulp, Megrez swallowed his saliva and stiffened his expression.

Megrez had some confidence in his ability to fight. His physical strength and

stamina were absolutely useless, but he was an elf. He had magic.

In the first place, elves were humans who were changed by mana, and were the race out of the seven who were most suited to magic.

Magic was an academic practice. It was made of theories and logic. Almost all living things had mana inside of them, but to turn that into phenomena, one needed their own formulas, which were something one just didn't master in a single day or night.

For the same magic, if a human were to learn it, it would take ten-odd years to obtain, although that depended a bit on the human's natural talent. A human's average lifespan was around sixty years, so over ten years would be over 10% of their lifespan. But elves usually needed only about half the time to learn magic (it depended on the elf, though), and using that amount of time to learn magic was nothing to the long-lived elves.

That's why elves and vampires were good at magic.

And speaking of long-lived races, there was one other.....

"Master, I'd like to take this job..."

A girl stopped the master just as he was about to go through the entrance to the back room and showed him a job request form.

"Oh, if it isn't the lady with the black wings. That job's pretty tough, but it shouldn't be a problem for you."

She was a beautiful girl. Megrez fell in love at first sight.

First, the proportions of her face were near perfect. It was remarkable even among elves, who were all beautiful. Then, there was her golden hair. Her hair, which turned scarlet around her neck down, was like fire. Her eyes were also like bright rubies. But the most striking feature of hers was the pitch-black wings that grew from her back.

Megrez had heard that the heaven-winged all had white wings, but apparently, people like her existed.

Megrez watched her as she quickly left after stating her intentions. Meanwhile, Megrez questioned the young man.

“Who was that?”

“Ahh, you’re surprised? She’s a heaven-winged girl. She’s an adventurer even though she’s a girl. And she’s beautiful to boot. She’s really good, too, so there’s no one here who doesn’t know her.”

“That’s surprising but.....the color of her wings is rare, right? I’d heard that the heaven-winged’s wings were all white, but am I behind the times?”

“No, your knowledge is correct. Well, basically, she’s the same as us.She has nowhere to go. At least, other than a cesspool like this.”

“Well, sorry for being a cesspool!”

The master, who had heard the young man’s comment, slammed his fist into the guy’s head, eliciting a cry of pain.

But Megrez didn’t care; his thoughts were fixed on the black-winged girl he just saw.

The heaven-winged prided themselves on the whiteness of their wings. Then that meant that girl surely lost her place in her hometown. She had no other choice than to come to a human town and work as an adventurer.

When he thought that, Megrez realized how blessed he was. As well as just how little he belonged in that dingy bar..... He left his forest without much thought, but he had somewhere to go back to. He’d be laughed at for 75 years, but he at least had people who would accept him.

But there was no one like that for her.

* *

Megrez did well, using water magic to destroy the golem to pass the store’s test and get permission to be an adventurer from the master.

Since that happened, it was inevitable that next he’d take on a job. After all, Megrez had no money. He couldn’t afford an inn, nor could he buy any food.

Megrez had the option of camping out for around three days with the supplies he brought with him, but he didn’t have any backup after that. So making money as fast as possible was top priority. For now, Megrez took on an easy-looking monster hunting job.

“So, why are you following me?”

“Aww, don’t get your panties in a bunch. I’m just being a little nosy. Like, I introduced you to this job, you know? So I’d feel bad if you up and died all of a sudden.”

Walking next to Megrez was the adventurer who introduced him to the job, holding the sword that seemed to be his favorite in one hand. His normal walking pace was probably faster, but he was matching Megrez, showing his consideration.

“Still, it was a good choice to go exterminate leps. Leps used to be rabbits, so they aren’t terribly strong, and they haven’t changed too much, either. They’re just really violent bunnies that’re a size bigger. As long as they don’t let their guard down, even an average villager can kill one. Did you know? Monsters are just animals that have been changed with mana.”

“I know that much. Don’t make fun of me.”

Megrez was currently making his way through the vegetation of a forest near Ydalir. Recently, there’d been an outbreak of leps here, so the job this time was to reduce their numbers some. Basically, he was just getting rid of pests.

Leps.....officially named “Morrisleps,” were weak monsters as the young man described, but they reproduced very quickly. They were annoying if there were too many of them, and they’d ruin the ecosystem of the forest, so they needed to be culled regularly, but it was too small a job to call in the actual army every time. That was why it was a job for adventurers.

Of course, just because it was a job to exterminate leps didn’t mean that nothing but leps would show up, and sometimes adventurers would have to deal with some annoyingly strong monsters.

However, even if adventurers died, it wouldn’t be a breach of contract or a scam since taking jobs and dying and everything in between was all on the adventurer’s shoulders.

“Whoops, there they are.”

The man seemed to have noticed something as he looked up from the ground. His eyes were turned to a group of rabbits around 50 meters ahead. His

mouth curved upwards in a violent expression, and he readied his sword, resting it on his shoulder.

Won't that cut into your own shoulder if you aren't careful? Megrez thought, but decided not to say anything. He probably just wanted to look cool.

"There are seven, eight.....ten leps, huh?"

"Each one is weak, but having to deal with ten at once will be a little troublesome. Should we do it?"

"Didn't I tell you not to make fun of me?" Megrez said, sounding miffed, before swiftly using his right pointer finger to draw a circle in the air.

The basics for magic were three processes.

First was concentration. One needed to concentrate the mana inside them into a single point.

The 'vessel' to store mana until it was fired was completed by drawing a magic circle, and it would stay there until the magic was complete. In the circle was a pentagram. Each point represented an element, starting with wood at the top, then fire, earth, metal, and water in clockwise order. Then, one drew lines from wood to earth, earth to water, water to fire, fire to metal, and lastly, metal to wood. The lines showed the relationships between the elements. On top of that, a circle around the pentagram to represent the moon was drawn. And on top of that, one more circle for the sun.

All that took three seconds. Megrez was fast enough to be considered a veteran by human standards. At the very least, a newbie mage would need around ten seconds to do that.

Incantations? Such things didn't exist.

"First process, complete. Next, moving on to the second process. Converting mana. 120 MP into water mana, emit as ether. Construct magic formula, reinforce the circle. Charge complete, waiting to fire."

Megrez poured his mana into the completed vessel and fixed it in space.

It only took an extra two seconds for a total of five seconds, but the leps noticed them. But it still wasn't a problem. There was more than enough

distance to make it.

That was the second process. Right now, the vessel only had pure mana, which hadn't been changed in any way. Letting it go now would do nothing. It might cause the mana-hating heaven-winged some discomfort, but that's all.

Then came the third process—to change the mana into a phenomenon.

“Second process complete. Switching over to the third process. Changing to phenomenon. Isolate fire and wood mana, excise impurities, adjust density. Everything is within margin of error, there are no problems. Accelerate mana circulation, change to phenomenon. Third process complete.”

Taking another two seconds, Megrez completed his magic in only seven seconds.

Megrez's palm emitted a mass of fake water that was transformed from mana, and once it was complete, it waited to fire.

It was just fake water that would return to mana once the spell was over, but it wasn't much different from the real thing until it disappeared. No, it was more compressed and concentrated than real water could ever be in nature, so it was far more dangerous. Weighing around 100 tons, the water was being compressed, ignoring the laws of physics. Of course, if such a thing hit you, it would do more than just hurt.

“Woah?!! That's super fast! It hasn't even been ten seconds?!”

“Human magic is too slow. You all should be able to at least shoot off some weak magic in ten seconds.Go, 'Aqua Blast!'”

Apparently, the young man had thought the leps would reach them before Megrez finished his magic.

He wasn't wrong. In actuality, it would be true for most humans who were just starting as mages, and they'd probably need someone to buy them time to finish their spell. However, Megrez was a long-lived elf who could train for several hundred years. Common sense didn't apply to him.

In fact, for Megrez, it was an insult to already be surprised at something of this level.

The final form of magic that all elves strived for was to be able to shoot off spells instantly with no need for preparation. Right now, it was but a distant, unreachable peak, but Megrez had decided that he would get there some day. Still, that was far-off in the future. Right now, it was all he could manage to blast through four lined-up rabbits.

“Four, huh?My aim was a little off.”

“No, that was great for a preemptive attack! You did great!” the young man roared happily as he faced the six leps that had finally reached them head on.

Each one was around an adult man’s thighs in height, and the young man’s sword flashed as it swung against these giant rabbits.

When he made his first swing, three of the leps who had unguardedly charged at him were cut down pitifully, turning into hunks of meat. Then, the young man’s sword flashed again as he attacked with a backswing. This one bisected the last three leps that were shocked into freezing because of the first attack.

The most surprising thing was the young man’s skills, as he managed to kill six of them in only two swings. It seemed like he was relying on the sharpness of his blade, but no, it was more the weight of it. The sound the sword made when it was being swung wasn’t normal.

“That sword..... How heavy is it?”

“Dunno. I picked the heaviest one I could so that it’ll still kill things when I swing even if the blade is dull. Well, personally, I’d like a heavier one, but.....I have no money.”

The young man laughed merrily as Megrez internally recategorized him into someone with idiotic strength. Humans were more physically powerful than elves (rather, elves were just way too weak), but even so, his strength was abnormal.

I see. So he isn’t just arrogant.

To Megrez, he was strong enough that it didn’t make any sense why he was still an adventurer. Megrez even figured it was a bit of a waste, since the man could probably become a knight.

“Now then, usually heads are the proof of extermination, but with how big these are, you can probably take back their entire bodies if you stuff them in hard enough. Their meat is delicious and nutritious, too. It’s kind of a waste to just take their heads and throw away the rest.”

“.....You’re going to eat that?”

“Well, of course. Adventurers are eternally poor. If you can save, you need to save. Ah, right. Elves don’t like meat, was it?”

“It’s not just elves. The heaven-winged don’t like meat either, right?”

“For them, it’s more like they don’t like meat that has mana in it or meat from birds. If it’s regular animals, they actually like it, it seems.”

While talking, the young man started to stuff the carcasses into a dirty bag that he’d brought with him. It was a pretty gruesome, or rather bloody, sight. Megrez, who wasn’t used to it at all, averted his eyes as he started to turn green.

“Not used to this, huh?”

“.....Yeah. Since we fundamentally don’t kill animals. Much less gather their bodies or cut off their heads.....”

“Get used to it. You’re an adventurer.”

“I know.”

As was mentioned before, leps were violent rabbits that were a little large. In other words, from the outside, they were uselessly cute, which stirred up unpleasant feelings in Megrez. There were even women that found leps too cute to kill. Of course, they were all rich ladies with heads full of flowers.

“Now then, let’s go back for now. It’d be hard to keep going carrying this much stuff, after all.”

“It’s not over with just this trip?”

“No. Depending on the job, they warn you that it’ll take several days. The job is actually pretty easy this time, since it’s so close to Ydalir.”

With a grunt of effort, the young man heaved up the bag that was starting to

drip with blood. Megrez could tell blood was pooling at the bottom of the bag, but it didn't seem like the man cared.

At the very least, that's impossible for me, Megrez thought.

The young man started walking, and Megrez followed.

All that was left to do was go back the way they came. There wasn't any guarantee they wouldn't encounter more monsters, but no problems should occur as long as they didn't let their guards down.

Megrez was about to do just that, since he'd just finished his first job, but that was prevented by the sound of an animal roaring.

".....Huh? Something big is coming this way."

"Ah?"

Megrez had already heard it, but the young man probably hadn't sensed anything yet. Elves had better hearing than humans. But the sound gradually grew closer, and the young man's expression grew more stern.

He dropped the bag to the ground and readied his sword. His expression said that he was ready for anything.

"Yeah, there's something bad coming this way. It's going to be pretty big. Ready your magic now."

"Got it."

There was no need for the young man to tell him; Megrez was already preparing a spell. He could tell just from the sounds how big the enemy was. And from the roar, he could tell how dangerous it was. Either signal was plenty to consider the enemy a danger.

Apparently, there was something huge in this forest that wasn't indicated in the job form, and it was coming this way.

"Are there large monsters in this forest?"

"There shouldn't be anything other than worldvines.....but this one's clearly different."

Worldvines were giant boars that lived in the forest. They were over two

meters tall. They were plenty dangerous to a newbie adventurer, but the sounds the two of them were hearing were clearly different. It was larger and sounded much more dangerous. And it was coming closer at a remarkable speed; the two of them couldn't help but get nervous.

".....It's here!" the young man said, and at the same time, the trees were mowed over, revealing it.

Even at the smallest estimate, it was over 15 meters tall, and it looked just like a giant reptile. Its large mouth was lined with fangs, and it seemed like it would rip a person in half with one bite. It had tiny, almost wilted-looking arms and a blackened body, as well as a fat tail.

It was described as a dragon, and its silhouette was incredibly close to that feared creature, but it wasn't a dragon. No, in the first place, it wasn't a monster. Only a simple 'animal.' But its viciousness and power were stronger and more monster-like than some monsters', and it was feared by many people. A portion of scholars even stated, "Why not just call it a monster already?"

Since ancient times, they'd existed in the world in small numbers, and if they were mutated by mana, they'd turn into a fearsome dragon. People named them "Dinosaurs," a name filled with fear.

"I-isn't that a dinosaur?! What the hell is a dinosaur doing in this forest?!"

"A-and that shape..... This is bad, that's a dinorex; it's a large carnivore!"

"So it's the worst one?!"

Dinorex, a large dinosaur. Among the small handful of dinosaur species, it was the strongest and worst. It possessed unparalleled aggressiveness and might, and it considered everything in front of it food. Humans, animals, monsters, even devilfolk.....as long as it was nearby, it was an enemy and therefore food. It simply used pure power to eat and kill everything, as if it was saying 'you all are so puny, bothering with your monsters or magic or whatever!'

They didn't mind getting some wounds, they wouldn't stop, and they wouldn't falter.

Such a natural-born monster was in front of Megrez and his friend right now, unleashing its cry.

“GAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!”

The cry that was hard to apply language to spread through the forest, shaking the very air. That voice, which probably sent all the surrounding animals and monsters running for their lives, sapped away the two's will to fight.

“I-I get it now. This thing is at fault for the boom of leps. Because it came to the forest, all the leps' natural predators ran.”

“Then why are only the leps left?”

“As if I'd know. Maybe they're so small they aren't even worth eating? And this is just the worst.....that bastard just had a fight. It's all pumped up since it got hurt!”

The dinorex was covered in wounds here and there, and they were still bleeding. It was surprising that there was something that could wound the invincible-seeming dinorex, but whatever it was probably wasn't alive anymore.

But more importantly, since the dinorex was left alive but wounded, it was still agitated and on a rampage.

“Fuck!! We have to do it, elf bro! Don't go pissing yourself in fear now!”

“Right back at you!” Megrez shouted, as if to drive away his fear, before unleashing the spell he had prepared.

It was the same spell, Aqua Blast, that killed so many leps earlier.

The bullet of compressed water flew straight and knocked the dinorex's jaw upward.

The ball of water looked like a sphere that was a little too big to carry in both arms, but its weight was over a ton, since it ignored the laws of physics. In other words, it was as if the dinorex was struck with a bullet that weighed a ton.

However, although the dinorex's jaw flew upwards, there wasn't any more damage than that, and in fact, all it did was turn its anger-clouded attention on Megrez.

“No good, it didn't work!”

“Well, from the looks of it, our customer over there's several tons heavy.....

No wonder it wouldn't do much."

If one was asked whether or not an impact of one ton was weak or strong, it would be strong. At the very least, if a human was hit with it, they wouldn't just end up with some injuries. However, it was comparable to simply being tackled by a one-ton animal, and many animals as heavy as that existed in nature. Of course, none of those creatures could bring down a dinorex. It would probably just use its simple weight advantage to sweep them away.

In other words, Megrez needed something more powerful in order to defeat it.

"TAAAKE THIISSSSS!!"

The young man made a sweep with his sword, slamming his weapon into the leg of the dinorex. But the hit was shallow. The sword was stopped by the dinorex's legs and wouldn't keep going.

It wasn't as if there was no damage. His sword definitely bit into the dinorex's flesh, and it was bleeding as a result. However, given its thick muscles and the difference in size, it wasn't a large wound at all.

Even a strike that would cleave a human in two was like being cut with a small knife to a dinosaur. As all that strike did was stoke the flames of the dinorex's anger, it could be said to have had a detrimental effect.

"JAOOOOOOOO!!"

"Whooaahh?!"

The dinorex swept at the young man with its thick tail.

The young man managed to react and jumped backwards to evade, leaving the tail sweep to miss him and continue on to easily snap a couple trees.

The power behind that attack was scary; if it had connected, it would most likely have killed him in one hit.

Continuing on, the dinorex opened its jaw and lunged at the young man with its sharp fangs.

The young man was quick-witted, though.....and by a hair's breadth, he dodged the dinorex, landing next to Megrez.

“No good, my sword doesn’t do much either! Hey, elf, don’t you have any more powerful spells?”

“I do! But it’ll take time!”

“How much?”

“Twenty..... No, I can do it in fifteen seconds!”

“Fifteen seconds.....”

Fifteen seconds. Considering it would be a high-tier spell, it was plenty fast.

At the very least, if a newbie human mage tried to do the same thing, they’d take like a minute, and even a pretty well-known mage would need around thirty seconds. So by those standards, fifteen seconds was, once again, plenty fast. It was fast.....but.

“I’ll have to keep that busy for fifteen seconds, huh..... That’s gonna be hard.”

Their enemy was a dinosaur, and a dinorex at that. The difficulty was on a whole other level.

However, it was the job of a front-liner to buy enough time for back-liners to cast their spells, and it wasn’t a situation where he could refuse, either. The young man couldn’t land a decisive blow himself, so since he’d be relying on magic to finish the job, he had to take an appropriate amount of risk, too.

“Do it in ten!” The young man made a ridiculous request to Megrez before charging at the dinorex.

Originally, ‘impossible’ would be a light description for telling someone to cast a spell that takes fifteen seconds in ten. In fact, even being able to cast a spell that would work against a dinorex in fifteen seconds indicated a talent that adventuring parties would flood with requests. Even the young man knew that.

He knew it, but that just showed how much he needed Megrez to achieve the impossible.

“Starting first process. Drawing magic circle. Wood to earth, earth to water, water to fire, fire to metal, and metal to wood. Connecting the pentagram of relationships and surrounding it with the circles of sun and moon. First process complete!”

The young man made a shallow slice into the dinorex before immediately opening up a distance. He didn't have to try to defeat it. As long as he managed to keep its attention, it was fine.

The young man needed to make the dinorex believe he was a threat, therefore concentrating all its attention onto him to buy time. So he didn't need any flashy or vicious attacks, nor did he need to approach too aggressively. He just needed to escape for ten seconds while drawing its attention.

"Next, moving on to the second process. Converting mana. 120 MP into water mana, emit as ether. Constructing magic formula, defining shape. Charging complete, on standby. Second process complete!"

Megrez was muttering a progress report at an incredible speed, but in truth, he didn't actually have to do that. But it wasn't completely without merit. By putting the progress of his spell in words, he could let his friends know how close he was to firing his spell. If the front line could estimate how long it would take for the spell to be completed, they'd have an easier time getting out of the field of fire, lowering the chances of friendly fire.

Rather, staying silent while constructing a spell would be more annoying. The front line would be unable to estimate when they needed to pull back, and if they were to be suddenly attacked from behind, that would cause them to be unable to dodge, turning friendlies into shields for the enemy.

But depending on circumstances, it could also be a bad move. For example, when the enemies were also human. Since the enemies would also understand speech, it would be like announcing when you were about to attack. Any attack made like that would miss.

On top of that, there was a technique where the mage could report fake progress, but either way, the dinosaur in front of Megrez couldn't understand speech, so that was useless.

"WOAAARRGGGGHH!" The young man yelled a battle cry as he continued to attack the dinorex.

His armor was now damaged, and even grazes left him covered in wounds. It wasn't as if he was weak; it was just that the dinorex was far too strong. Rather, he should be praised for being able to last so long against a dinorex.

“Moving on to the third process. Converting to phenomenon. Isolate fire and wood mana, eliminate all impurities, adjust density. Omit problem check, start compressing. Accelerate mana circulation, convert to phenomenon. Third process complete!”

“I’ve been waiting for that!”

As soon as Megrez announced that his magic was complete, the young man jumped to the side. He was pretty well-versed on how to cooperate with mages. If the front line didn’t pull back, the mages couldn’t unleash their spells. So front-liners needed to be able to retreat quickly as well as be able to distract the enemy. Simpletons who could only charge forward would find it impossible to team up with mages.

On that point, he passed. Contrary to his rough personality and manner of speech, he knew when to pull back. Thanks to that, Megrez could promptly fire his magic without worry!

“Cut it apart, Water Jet!”

Immediately after, a laser of water shot out of the magic circle that Megrez had constructed in a straight line.

No, since it was made of water, it wasn’t a laser. At the very least, the word was technically wrong, and it wasn’t accurate as an example, either. But the young man thought ‘laser’ when he first saw the spell go off.

If a new word were to be invented for it, it would probably be “water flash.” It was just that sharp and fast. The water drew a line to its target in an instant and pierced through the dinorex.

But the magic wasn’t over yet. It was just starting.

The superfine jet of water that was almost traveling at the speed of sound could cut through diamond.

Megrez moved his hand, and little by little, the flow of water changed heading. When it did, the jet of water moved along with it, easily cutting the dinorex apart. In fact, the water pierced through the dinosaur and even cut apart the trees behind it.

Eventually, the spell attack was over, and at the same time, the severed head of the dinorex made a sound as it fell off. After a delay, the trees behind it also fell over. Looking a little farther away, all the trees for several tens of meters behind the dinosaur were cut down.

“O-Ohh.....that’s some amazing power. All the trees behind it are gone, too.I hope the country doesn’t come complaining after this.”

“The country should have some wood element heaven-arts users. They can just regenerate the trees. Definitely. Well, they’ll probably complain a little, but.....it’s better than being eaten by that thing, no?”

“Haha! You said it!”

The dinorex was defeated, and freed from the tension, the young man laughed together with Megrez.

Neither of them expected to see a dinosaur, but once it was over, it meant that they managed to kill a giant. The results were more than enough for Megrez’s first mission. Even a veteran adventurer wouldn’t want to take on a dinorex, and a country’s soldiers would probably have to be prepared for death. And just two adventurers managed to do it. It was an achievement they should’ve been proud of.

However, another giant dragon’s face came slipping out from the cover of the forest, as if it was aiming for the exact moment they let their guards down. It was the same as the one they just defeated, a dinorex..... No, in fact, it was even bigger.

And it showed itself to Megrez and the young man.

“.....No way.”

“.....I’d like to believe it’s a lie, too.”

No, no more. I can’t take any more.

That was both of their honest feelings.

Even taking down one dinorex was something akin to a miracle. To have another one come out, and right after the other one, too... On top of that, it was even bigger than the first? The two of them could only think it was some

kind of harassment.

However, as if it didn't care about what the two of them were thinking, the dinorex took a step.....

—And immediately afterwards was crushed by a falling black angel.

“.....Wha?”

Black feathers scattered and fell slowly. Her flame-like blonde hair swayed, and she stood on top of the dinorex as if that was the natural state of their pecking order.

The dinosaur was motionless. With just that one hit, she crushed its head, completely ignoring the size difference, killing it instantly.

The black angel raised her face as if she wasn't fazed at all by what just happened and seemed to notice Megrez and the young man for the first time. After that, she looked over towards the headless dinosaur on its side near Megrez and the young man, and her face scrunched up.

“.....So it ran all the way here.”

“J-just how many times do I have to be surprised today, elf bro?”

“Don't worry, I'm surprised, too.”

She defeated a dinorex, which took them so much effort to defeat, with one hit. Megrez couldn't even muster a laugh.

After looking closer, Megrez saw that it was the same heaven-winged girl from the bar. From the fact that she just naturally killed that dinorex earlier, it seemed that the job she took on back then was to kill these dinosaurs.

When she locked eyes with Megrez, she apologized to them.

“Ahh.....sorry. That dinorex there was one I was hired to kill, but it ran away in the middle of the fight.....it seems like I've caused you some trouble. I apologize greatly.”

“A-Ahh, don't worry about it..... Wait, you had to kill two dinorexes?! Damn, girl, I can't believe you took that job.”

“No, I didn't know they were dinorexes, either. The form just said that there

was something ruining the ecosystem of this forest, so I was to investigate the cause and, if possible, kill it. I didn't expect the cause to be a dinorex couple, but well, I figured it would work out, so I attacked them.I never would have expected dinorexes, who are famous for being fearless, to run away from battle. Forgive me."

What the hell? The dinorex got scared and ran? Just how strong is she?
thought both Megrez and the young man, in awe of the black angel in front of them.

They'd heard that animals were sensitive to the strength of others, but they'd never heard of a dinorex running from an opponent.

Sure, they'd probably run in the face of a dragon, but to run from one of the human races.....

Even if there was someone like that, it'd have to be someone on par with the famous Vampire Princess Benetnasch, who was said to be the world's strongest. At the very least, they'd have no business being an adventurer.

"Y-you..... What's your level?"

"416."

Megrez reflexively did a spit take. So did the young man.

It wasn't important, but Megrez was level 42. The young man was also probably around there.

"416?! What the fuck is with that level?! Why are you even an adventurer?!"

"N-no way..... Even the elder of the forest was only 160....."

"Like, even getting past level 100 is rare! It's said that there may be around ten people like that in the world!"

Being in shock after hearing about her level was just natural.

For the standards of this world, a trained soldier would be about level 50 or lower, and those promoted to captain would be skilled if they were over level 60. Being in triple digits already made one a hero, and it could be said that those people surpassed human limits.

No, they, in fact, did surpass human limits. In the triple digits, a person could not only withstand a tail sweep from a dinosaur, they'd actually be able to catch the tail and turn it into a throw. Let alone being over level 300, at that point, the person would surpass any monsters or even the devilfolk.

"To me, I'm still immature. I'm not nearly at my goal..... No, my starting line. At the very least, I'll need to be level 1000."

"At the very least?! You'd be at the very top! Even the strongest being in the world, Benetnasch, is level 600, and you're aiming higher?!"

"Of course. In the first place, this world's standards are strange. It's like the world is telling you to be afraid of monsters and devilfolk and just keep running. As if it won't allow you to do anything else. Well, I'm not satisfied with allowing that unreasonableness to keep going forever."

Her statement was a roundabout way of criticizing the goddess.

The goddess controlled every system in the world, such as the strength of beings living in it. The black angel deemed that strange and declared that she did not like this world that had set humanity as weaklings.

However, mysteriously, it seemed like she'd be able to fulfill all her goals.

"By the way, it seems you two are pretty strong yourselves. I never would have thought a dinorex would be killed by some other adventurers."

".....Well thanks. It just sounds like gloating coming from you, though."

"I'm complimenting you for real, though." The black angel pouted, unsatisfied, before starting to butcher the dinorex's skin and bones with a knife.

The materials yielded by a dinosaur were valuable. The young man also quickly went over to the dinorex he and Megrez defeated and started to take it apart as well. Only Megrez sat and watched over them, green in the face.

"But you know, I wouldn't have been able to do it by myself. It's all thanks to that elf over there."

"Hm.....the trees were all well cut, I see. It must have been amazing magic."

"Yeah. Oh, that's right, bro. Why don't we team up from now on? I think we'll make good partners."

The young man invited Megrez to form an adventuring party. Of course, there was nothing Megrez would like more. Megrez was a back-lining mage, so he wasn't suited for adventuring solo. On that point, he had no complaints about partying. The young man filled all the checkboxes as a front-liner.

"How 'bout you, black-winged girl? There's probably a lot that's harder for you by yourself."

"Hm, not a bad idea. Not bad.....but, if you're going to join me, I will have you raise your levels to an appropriate stage. You'll need to at least be able to defeat a dinosaur by yourself."

"B-be gentle, okay?"

The young man stopped taking apart his prey, and violently wiped his bloodied hands on his pants. After that, he washed them with some water he brought along and walked up between Megrez and the girl.

"Well then, let's shake hands now that we've formed a party. I'm Alioth. One day I'm going to be the world's best swordsman."

The young man—Alioth—introduced himself, giving a toothsome smile while announcing his grand ambition. Going along with that, the girl also stood, and after cleaning her own hands, she grabbed his.

"I'm Lufas. Lufas Maphaahl."

Lastly, Megrez rushed to wipe his hands on his pants. In the first place, he never touched the dinosaurs directly, so his hands were still clean, though. Then, he took Lufas' hand and introduced himself.

"I'm Megrez. Pleased to meet you."

That day, in a small forest, a single adventuring party was formed. They would later continue on to shake the world, breaking thoughts long held as common sense one after the other, but that's a story for the future.

Though they would one day part, for the present they were simple youngsters chasing dreams.



Afterword

Picking this book up on a whim. Are you sure?

I'm an author that doesn't mind writing *those* kinds of stories, you know?

Hello, everyone. My name is Firehead.

Firstly, thank you all so very much for picking up "A Wild Last Boss Appeared!"

No, honestly, I never even dreamed the day would come where I would be writing the afterword to an actual book. I figured I'd just be writing stories on the internet as a hobby forever. In fact, I never even thought I'd win a big award for web novels.

I just figured that, well, if all went well I'd pass the first or second round, so I would have been totally happy if I passed the second round. But by the time I noticed, for some reason, I'm publishing a book like this and even writing the afterword.

Anything can happen in this world. It's unpredictable.

It was decided that I'd be putting out a book only a scant month after uploading to Narou. It was the end of October.

"Urggh~, novel, novel..." Right now, I'm just a common web novelist who's running full speed to get featured on a novel site.

If I were to point out something different about me, it would have to be that I'm interested in the website's contest. —My name is Firehead.

So, I went to the Narou website.

The first thing I saw was a new message in my inbox.

Yes!! Nice, Earth Star Novels, I thought. Then suddenly, Earth Star Novels started sinking in their hooks.

"Wanna (novelize)?" I, weak to the temptation, agreed to the idea then and there.

AAHHHHHH!Well, that's basically how it went.

But now that I've made an actual book, it was much more work than I expected.

It was a storm of typos, missing words, plot holes, and inconsistencies... Every time I looked over my draft, more and more kept popping up! Like, even though Lufas headed over to Aries on the same day, Mars said some incomprehensible things like, "Aries has been sleeping for several days"..... Well, Mars is an idiot, so it wouldn't be impossible to just explain it away with that fact.

Now then, let's leave the personal stories that don't benefit anyone here. Let's finally talk about what happened in the book.

First, what did you think after reading "A Wild Last Boss Appeared!"? If possible, I'd like it if you emptied your mind and turned off your brain before reading.

At the very least, the main character, Lufas, isn't thinking of anything.

She (or he), the main character Lufas Maphaahl, was written with the concept "Last boss on the outside, gamer on the inside."

It's kind of like if the car was the best, most advanced car in the world, but the driver was still a newbie just about to attend driving school. The specs of the car and what's inside don't match at all. So they're not really thinking anything in particular, and they'll just start doing things because of a random thought.

However, the character's physical abilities are top-notch, so even if the person was just planning to move a little, it might cause a huge storm or something.

Of course, letting such a person run free would turn the story into a complete mess, so they'd need something or someone to serve as training wheels. That's where the character Dina comes in.

If Dina weren't there, Lufas would just randomly wander around the world as her whims dictate, and she'd probably be wanted by everyone in the world in a flash. The self-appointed advisor Dina supports and controls Lufas' thoughtless actions and lack of knowledge, acting as training wheels to guide Lufas to their goal.

But, these training wheels will sometimes change their direction on their own, and she has a side to her that sometimes prioritizes her own opinions. She calls herself a loyal advisor, but she's pretty selfish and willful. That's Dina as a character.

And by getting the artist to make her as cute as possible, oh my, how strange. It's a character that you just can't hate even though she's selfish!

And the first of the Twelve Heavenly Stars they gain in Svel, Aries, is a boy who looks like a girl, which has been very popular lately.

Putting it bluntly, Aries is basically just a girl who happens to have something between her legs. He's fundamentally introverted, and compared to Lufas, who doesn't think, and Dina, who's far too free, he seems very grounded in common sense.

But he does have one peculiarity. When it comes to Lufas, he immediately goes berserk, so he really does have a screw loose somewhere.

I've put thought and care into every other character, too, like Megrez, Gantz, Levia, the orcs, and Tanaka. Every single one of them is a problem child with one or two 'traits,' but as an author, nothing would make me happier than if you came to like all of them.

However, the most important, wonderful thing is YahaKo's illustrations.

Just seeing Lufas drawn up in a way that doesn't let you realize how much of a dud she is on the inside, or Dina looking so cute, already makes me satisfied.

There's just one thing for me to say. Even if my story has no value, the illustrations do.

To all who lay their hands on this book: Please let yourself be taken in by the art and buy it.

The fact that I'm able to write a strange story like this and put it out as a book is all thanks to Sir S from Earth Star Novels who first reached out to me, as well as YahaKo, who drew such beautiful illustrations.

As well as everyone else who had a hand in producing this.

Thank you all so much, everyone.

Also, to all of you, if you haven't been disillusioned already with this volume, I'll see you again in the second volume's afterword.

Thank you for reading!



It was really fun drawing Mars,
a character I liked, getting
beat up so badly lol.



Yahako

A Wild Last Boss Takes a Bath

Women are troublesome.

I've always thought that, but now that I've become Lufas, my opinion's only gotten stronger.

First, my chest is heavy, and I just can't calm down because I feel like I'm missing something between my legs.

Luckily, stuff like this no longer fazes me. I suppose I should call it.....the uneasiness of feeling that something is missing. It's a strange feeling that could drive someone mad, but I'm probably just dull, or rather, really hardened against that feeling.

But setting that aside, there is no way I can get around the troubles of being a woman. There's really a lot of factors in this, but one of them has got to be baths.

This happened when we were staying in Svel.

After I calmed down Aries, we stopped by the public baths before Dina and I went to see Megrez. Even though the fight wasn't that hard, I still got a little dirty, you know?

I was pretty grateful for the fact that Svel had a bathing culture. In the first place, elves were people of the forest, so they had a habit of cleansing their bodies in springs and the like. So apparently, that translated into a culture of cleansing one's body in pools of hot water. (On the other hand, it seemed like the heaven-winged didn't have bathing in their culture. Why?)

Luckily for me, there was no one else in the baths at this time.

This country was just attacked by a huge army of monsters the day before, so it might have been because no one had the leeway to be carefree and take a bath, but.....at any rate, it was good luck for me. If anyone was here, my wings would stand out too much, after all.

So, after I quickly washed myself before taking a dip in the bath, Dina raised a complaint just as I was about to get in.

“W-wait a second, Miss Lufas! You aren’t planning on getting in without wrapping up your hair, are you?!”

“Hm? Yes, is there a problem?”

“What are you thinking?! You can’t do that!”

“?”

I don’t understand why not. Baths are something you use to wash your body and hair, so not wrapping it would obviously make it easier to clean. Or rather, wrapping or binding one’s hair is meant to allow them to move easier or as some sort of fashion. I didn’t have any desire to bother with that in a bath.

Also, I’ve consumed my fair share of anime, light novels, manga, and such, and there are a lot of series that feature heroines going into baths without doing that.

“You’ll be bothering anyone that comes after, you know? If any of your long hair falls out, it’ll give a really filthy impression to see that just floating in the bath.”

“Ahh, understood.”

With that reasoning, even I understood. My, or Lufas’, hair was excessively long. It easily reached past her hips almost down to her knees. If several of those hairs fell out and were just floating in the water..... Yeah, I wouldn’t want to get in a bath like that.

It’s not really relevant, but it seems that the feathers on my wings don’t come out that easily. I still washed my wings thoroughly, just in case, but I don’t think seeing a feather just floating in the bath would set a good impression, either.

I see; no wonder taking baths never caught on with the heaven-winged.

“Well, We suppose We could just wrap a towel around our hair.”

For the moment, I wrapped a towel around my head like a turban, forcing my hair up.

I sunk into the water up to my shoulders and looked at Dina, who was in front of me.

Her glossy, blue hair, too-perfect doll-like face, and her completely smooth, white skin... She was obviously a beautiful girl. Ignoring how the perception of beauty changed between countries and eras she was perfectly beautiful to me, with my modern, Japanese aesthetic sense, at the very least.

And said beautiful girl was in front of me, right now, wearing only a towel. If I just removed that thin towel, she'd be, put bluntly, naked as the day she was born.

Normally, this would be an extremely stimulating situation for me. As a virgin who'd never even kissed a girl, I'd normally be extremely excited right now. And as I was, I would have definitely been fidgeting intensely, glancing at Dina over and over again, unable to calm down.

But I wonder why it's as if my heart is made of stone.

I could see her slightly flushed, pink skin due to the heat of the bath, the valley between her breasts hidden behind that towel, and her beautiful, white legs.

There was no way I'd get a nosebleed like in a manga, but still, this shouldn't be a situation where I could remain calm.

But right now, my heart *is* calm, like a cat that is ignoring its owner.

Strange. Am I a withered husk?

"What's wrong, Miss Lufas?"

"No, nothing."

It seemed that after becoming a woman, my sexual interest in them had been completely lost. I could think that they were beautiful, cute, or pretty. I could think that they were attractive. But that would be it.

Just like looking at a piece of art, even if I thought, '*pretty*,' it didn't arouse any lust in me.

Just like that, even though I could look at Dina and recognize that she was beautiful, it didn't stir up any emotions past that for me.

.....No way; could it be? Will I think that way about men now?

That really wouldn't be funny. Rather, I hate that with every fiber of my being.

As if it was laughing at me, the image of an uber-ripped macho man popped up in the back of my head, and I could imagine myself thinking, *'oh well,'* and giving a thumbs up.

I'M TELLING YOU, YOU'RE WRONG! WHO THE HELL ARE YOU, EVEN?!

In my fantasy, I picked up the macho man that I myself imagined and threw him into space with all my might. Never come back!

As an aside, Aries wrapped up his hair and got in like it was a normal thing to do.

Damn, his girl power's off the charts.

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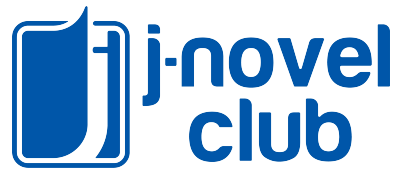
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A Wild Last Boss Appeared! Volume 1

by Firehead

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